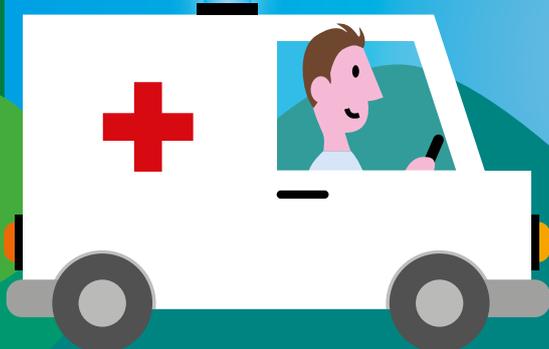


# OVERCOMING OBSTACLES IN BORDER REGIONS

## RESPONDING TO EMERGENCY ACROSS THE BORDER



### Hungary and Slovakia to step up joint emergency response

What if floods cause chaos on one side of the border but ambulances on the other cannot come to the rescue because of red tape?

That's a possible scenario along the Hungarian-Slovak border.

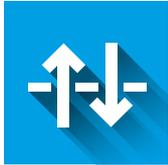
Authorities in the river-rich region have developed **close cooperation on water and natural disaster management** in recent years.

Joint projects have focused on more **effective flood control and protection**, developing forecasting models, streamlining data and improving collaboration and communication.

But due to **legal hurdles** hampering cross-border medical emergency services, ambulances can't cross the border, even if lives are at stake and the closest hospital is on the other side.

With climate change raising the risk of floods, political will in both countries has helped foster **collaboration on disaster management** in line with EU regulations. But the same is not happening for improving medical emergency and rescue services.

**The situation along the Hungarian-Slovak border reflects the need to evaluate and revise emergency-response systems in similar EU regions to ensure effective, coordinated action when disaster strikes.**



## So near, yet so far

The Hungarian-Slovak border regions share many similarities, with the population on both sides **facing common flood risks** and **limited access to healthcare**.

While there is considerable cooperation on cross-border natural disaster management, hurdles are hampering potentially **life-saving collaboration** on **emergency healthcare services**.

For example, ambulances are not allowed to circulate across the border.

This means that, in the event of an emergency, ambulances cannot transport patients from Slovakia to a hospital in Esztergom, Hungary, even though this is the **closest option** for people living in the Štúrovo region. During a 2011 car accident in Hungary, 13 wounded were taken to domestic hospitals significantly further afield than hospitals in neighbouring countries.



## When every minute counts

**Cross-border crisis and emergency management systems** cover everything from emergency medical services and rescue operations to flood relief and water management. When every minute counts, ensuring that these systems are in place can mean the difference between **life and death**.





## Cross-border agreements

A Hungarian and Slovak intergovernmental joint commission for cross-border cooperation was set up in 2001. Since then, a number of **bilateral agreements** have been reached between regional or local authorities in both countries that have resulted in successful projects.

However, more political will is needed to ensure further progress in the area of emergency and rescue services.

## Best practices

Flood risk management

- ▶ **good collaboration** between Hungarian and Slovak water-management institutions
- ▶ natural parks and risk-prevention authorities have **joined forces**
- ▶ cross-border projects have focused on **furthering inter-institutional cooperation, developing flood-forecasting models, streamlining and sharing data**
- ▶ **support from local and national policymakers** is fostering further cooperation amid the threat of climate change and the potential for catastrophic floods in the future.



## Border barriers

Emergency healthcare

- ▶ **ambulances cannot circulate between the two countries** – even in emergencies and if the nearest hospital is over the border
- ▶ **language** can complicate the sharing of key details on a patient's condition in emergency situations
- ▶ **cross-border patient mobility** in non-emergency scenarios is hampered due to differences in health insurance systems



## The Hungarian-Slovak border region



Population:  
**8 778 908**

- ▶ The Hungarian-Slovak border spans **677 km**.
- ▶ Large parts of the region are rural with an uneven population distribution that in places at times has **limited access to healthcare**.
- ▶ The **administrative units** on both sides of the border **differ significantly**, with the Slovak regions more dependent on the state government.
- ▶ The Slovak regions are much larger than the Hungarian regions although the overall population density is **similar**.
- ▶ The region shares **common flood risks and water-management issues**. Common catchment areas include that of the Danube, the Tisza/Tisa and smaller rivers such as the Ipoly/Ipel', Bodrog, Sajo/Slana and Hernad/Hornad.



## A wider European issue

Differences between national crisis, disaster, emergency response and healthcare services hinder cooperation among the EU's cross-border regions – posing a **threat to safety and the provision of life-saving services**.

Barriers to improving cooperation include **legal and administrative hurdles** at **local and national level** and **differences in language**. These barriers result in a **lack of clarity** on what emergency services can do and who is responsible for them.

**The EU has a role to play in fostering cooperation.** For example, EU rules relating to cooperation among EU countries on managing flood risks and on emergency responses to floods established the Emergency Response Coordination Centre and the EU Civil Protection Mechanism. More remains to be done at EU, national and local levels. In particular, risks could be effectively tackled through **stepped up sustained cooperation** in cross-border regions, along with one-off cooperation for a limited time – for example, on projects implementing flood prevention measures on a shared river.

### More information

Communication 'Boosting growth and cohesion in EU border regions': <http://bit.ly/2v5u4PK>

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The Cross-Border Review: <http://bit.ly/28h802K>

The full case study: <http://bit.ly/2vDFfs0>



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