Promotion of legal accessibility across the Slovak-Hungarian border

#ACCESS

Obstacle Monitoring

EXPERT INTERVIEWS

REPORT

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Table of contents

List of abbreviations **3**

1 Introduction **4**
About the #ACCESS project 4
Obstacle monitoring 4
Expert interviews 4

2 Methodological overview **5**

3 The results **7**
3.1 Transport 7
3.2 Health 9
3.3 Tourism 11
3.4 Agriculture 12
3.5 Commercial cooperation 13
3.6 Employment 13
3.7 Social services 15
3.8 Education 16
3.9 Territorial cooperation 17
3.10 Environment 17
3.11 Water management 18
3.12 Disaster management 19
3.13 Waste management 20
3.14 Nature protection 21
3.15 Forestry 22

4 Summary **24**
4.1 Information to continue the project 24
4.2 Experiences, information outside the project 24
4.3 Conclusions for cohesion policy after 2027 25

5 Annex **27**
5.1 List of interviewees 27

List of abbreviations

Summary	Abbreviation meaning
TDM	Tourism Destination Management *(Tourism Destination Management)*
NTAK	National Tourist Information Centre *(National Tourism Data Supply Centre)*
TEÁOR	Single Activity Classification System (Statistical Classification of Economic Activities)
KKV	Small and medium-sized enterprises *(SME - small and medium-sized enterprises)*
ICPDR	International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (*International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River)*
LIFE	L'Instrument Financier pour l'Environnement *(Financial Instrument for the Environment)*
GINOP	Economic Development and Innovation Operational Programme *(Economic Development and Innovation Operational Programme)*
ELA	European Labour Authority *(European Labour Authority)*
EURES	European Employment Services *(EURopean Employment Services)*

1 Introduction

About the #ACCESS project

Along the common border between Hungary and Slovakia, integration has made tangible progress thanks to European accession. Not only has foreign trade between the two countries increased spectacularly since 2004, reaching a record level of €17 billion in 2022, not only has the number of road border crossings open around the clock increased (from 6 before the change of regime to almost 40), but also cross-border commuting for labour market purposes affects the border region's population by the tens of thousands, while more than 1,000 Slovak students attend Hungarian schools and nearly 20,000 Slovak citizens already live in Hungary. Cross-border urban agglomerations similar to those in Western Europe have developed in the areas of Bratislava and Košice, and shopping tourism has become part of everyday life for residents since the opening of the Schengen area in December 2007: up to 75% of the turnover of some Hungarian cross-border shopping centres is generated by Slovak customers.

All these phenomena underline the importance of the strategic project '***Promotion of legal accessibility across the Slovak-Hungarian border'*** (**#ACCESS**). The project will be implemented from 1 May 2023 to 30 April 2029, and the two implementing partners, the Budapest-based Central European Service for Cross-border Initiatives (CESCI) and the Carpathian CESCI, based in Košice, aim to identify and remove as many legal and administrative obstacles as possible that hamper the movement of people along the border and the lives of border residents.

Obstacle monitoring

The project itself is divided into two phases: obstacle monitoring to identify barriers and obstacle management to remove them. The "obstacle monitoring" involves systematic collection of obstacles experienced by citizens living along the border using questionnaires, interviews, the operation of an online helpdesk and workshops of territorial reference groups in cross-border urban areas. The legal background of the barriers will be identified applying interviews with relevant authorities and analysis of relevant legislation in the second phase of the project.

Expert interviews

The purpose of the interviews with Hungarian and Slovak sector actors is to draw attention to the difficulties encountered and experienced so far and to suggest ways to address the problems encountered in the future. Removing barriers is made more difficult by the different administrative systems in neighbouring countries, where competences are not shared at the same territorial level.

The main objectives of the interviews for all sectors are

- understanding the quality, level and legal basis of Hungarian-Slovak cooperation to date,
- identify the types of obstacles,
- learn from the previous best practices.

2 Methodological overview

The interviewees were selected and approached on the basis of suggestions from the actors active at sectoral level in the border region. The interviews were mostly conducted online and rarely in face-to-face meetings. In all cases, the interviewee was briefly informed about the functioning of CESCI and the objectives of the ACCESS project, the current problems of the border region, and then, on the basis of an interview template, followed by structured conversation and then a more informal exchange of information was possible.

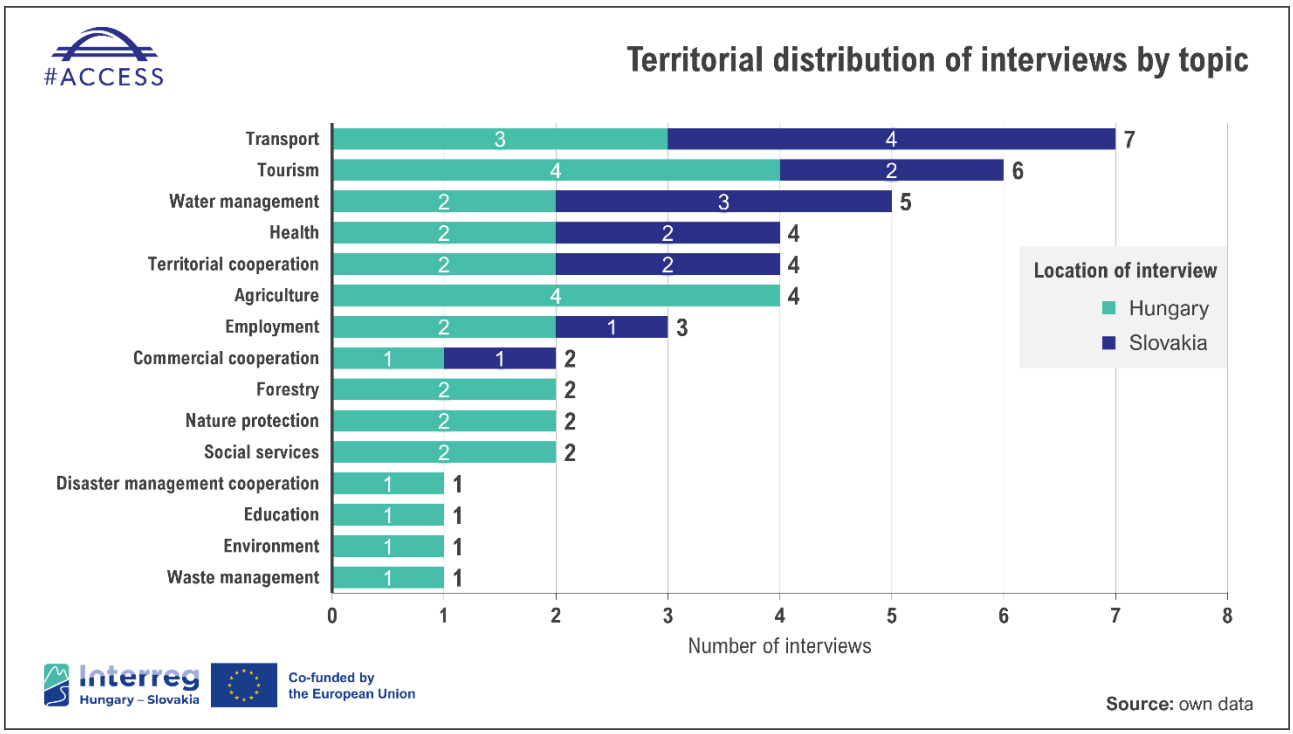
In addition to the framework and quality of the cooperation, the interview questions measured the form and regularity of communication between legislators and practitioners. In all cases, the type of obstacles identified the way in which they have been dealt with so far, and the possibilities for addressing them were clarified. The possibility of exchanging experiences between Hungary and Slovakia was also a recurrent issue.

The general aim of the interviews was to identify the actors in the sector, to collect and typify the obstacles they know. By getting to know the actors, it was possible to plan future actions in relation to specific barriers, to identify their recipients and the range of further stakeholders to be involved. By differentiating the barriers, the range of barriers that can be addressed and those that require further intervention can be prioritised through further project activities.

After presenting the methodology of the interviews, the report presents the conclusions by sector, highlighting the obstacles and difficulties caused by different structures or regulations, and taking stock of the obstacles to joint development. The summary consolidates general lessons for the next steps of the project, as well as the conclusions at policy level.

As shown in the figure below, 45 expert interviews were conducted on 15 topics:

Figure 1: Territorial distribution of interviews by topic



In each interview, we wanted to understand the legal context of the particular topic, the evolution of the legislative background and the open questions in the area in which the respondent has an expertise. Based on the experience, knowledge and understanding of the respondents, we obtained a lot of information about the status of the legislation.

Based on the results of the first round of interviews, it is clear that the information collected is very valuable and provides an interesting overview about the situation on the Hungarian-Slovak border in selected areas. We collected suggestions and ideas from the respondents on how the further development of the legal background could proceed and which legal obstacles could be further investigated with the aim of eliminating or mitigating them.

3 The results

In this chapter, we summarise the results of the expert interviews in a structured way for each sector.

3.1 Transport

In the field of public transport, there is no regular cooperation between the Hungarian and Slovak authorities, meetings are held ad hoc when a specific topic is addressed (e.g.: the cancellation of the 1986 Agreement on rail transport between Slovakia and Hungary).

As of 1.1.2024 the legislation in Slovakia is harmonised. The Act on Public Passenger Transport has been amended, which introduced a clear set of competencies and concepts.

Administrative obstacles related to public bus transport

Differing technical regulations (e.g. buses with international tests cannot transport standing passengers) are further complicated by language barriers. Handling different currency payments requires a training in cash handling. Change, separate euro, separate forint cash boxes have to be installed. In addition to the timetable improvements, the relevant regulatory differences (user charges, passenger rights issues, proof of identity) need to be clarified.

Diverging standards

For rail services, technical standards may differ, e.g. gauge width and voltage system. This is the case between Košice and Miskolc, where Railway Company of Slovakia (ŽSSK) operates multi-voltage locomotives, which are changed in Miskolc to the Hungarian trucks due to higher operating costs of the multi-voltage trucks. Without these locomotives the service between the two cities would not be feasible. MÁV START does not have multi-voltage locomotives.

Administrative obstacles in rail connections

On the Slovak side, the type of safety device and the regulations are different. Therefore, either a locomotive is needed to be changed at the border or the driver who has passed the tests on both sides. These are high-cost lines (there are e.g. locomotive running charges), timetable coordination is also required, so implementation is complicated and expensive. As the activity is market-based, negotiations take place at railway company level, sometimes without even inviting the legislator, so the resulting agreements may not be in line with the legislator's ideas.

Administrative obstacle stemming from the ban on cabotage

Under EU rules, buses used for international transport cannot carry domestic passengers. This rule which also applies to freight transport can be overridden by a bilateral agreement based on international law. Such a treaty could even be used to set up cross-border regional tariff systems, but the two countries would have to agree on the rate of compensation for losses of services.

If the regional transport company in Košice wants to expand its cross-border services in Hungary, an international agreement must be concluded. First, the service providers (i.e. Volánbusz in Hungary and the regional transport company in Košice) need to start negotiations and agree on conditions to avoid the cabotage ban and on the sharing of costs and revenues. Even if the line is operated by the

Slovak partner, they will have to agree on these conditions with the Hungarian partner. At the same time, the Hungarian national authority must be contacted and the company must obtain permission from the Slovak side to start the international service. If the two service providers (SK and HU) operate the same number of cross-border buses over roughly the same distance, this will facilitate the agreement as costs and revenues may be similar.

Driving licenses in cross-border traffic

The driving licenses for international passenger transport are regulated by European legislation. At the same time, besides the license, the drivers have to pass a differential test including information on the rules being in effect on the other side of the border. European legislation of other positions such as the conductors is also in preparation.

Weight restrictions make cross-border bus transport more difficult

There is a growing demand for the establishment of new bus lines among Slovaks living in the municipalities across the border in Hungary (especially in the cross-border areas of Bratislava and Košice regions), which is in the public interest (reducing emissions, saving time, etc.). At the same time, in the majority of cross-border roads, there is a weight limit in effect preventing bus transport.

Cross-border crossings of the SKHU are mostly under 3.5t with the exceptions below:

- Rusovce-Rajka
- Medveďov - Vámosszabadi
- Komárno - Komárom
- Štúrovo - Esztergom (ferry)
- Šahy - Hont-Parassapuszta
- Slovenské Ďarmoty - Balassagyarmat
- Šiatorská Bukovinka - Somoskőújfalu
- Kráľ - Bánvéve
- Milhosť - Tornyosnémeti
- Slovenské Nové Mesto - Sátoraljaújhely.

The solution would be to amend the annex of the *"Agreement between the Government of Hungary and the Government of the Slovak Republic on the traffic characteristics of public roads crossing the common state border",* which was signed in 2012. The agreement was promulgated in Hungary by Act XXIV of 2012 and in Slovakia by Notification of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic No. 151/2012.

VAT question

VAT for international bus transport is zero in Slovakia. Accordingly, when introducing the new integrated transport system in the Košice and Prešov regions (from 2024), based on the creation of transport zones, it was not possible to sell monthly passes on bus lines for international transport as 20% VAT should apply in zones outside the Slovak border (e.g. zone 121 - Hidasnémeti).

Road classification - an administrative obstacle to development

The infrastructural investments in road network are difficult due to the different ownership pattern of the two countries: while on the Hungarian side, roads of 2nd and 3rd classes might also be maintained

by the state and the cross-border roads always belong to the state-owned road infrastructure company (Magyar Közút Nkft.) in Slovakia, the lower classed roads used to be owned by the regional or the local governments - even if these roads cross the state border. This discrepancy in competences raises problems when preparing and implementing a cross-border road construction project (financing included), as well as in the respect of the maintenance works at these roads.

Administrative obstacles in shipping

In the field of **navigation qualifications,** conditions have changed significantly at EU level. Out of 24 training bodies in Europe, only 2 have agreed to the new training, which requires 3 years of schooling and half a year's training to become a sailor. The progress of transposition is worth monitoring. There should be a uniform use of documents for professional qualifications.

3.2 Health

The need for convergence of practices between emergency services in the context of different structures and rules

In practice, there are specific cases in which the SK ambulance service is closer to the patient in the territory of Hungary and would thus be able to provide emergency medical assistance earlier than the more distant HU ambulance service (and vice versa). A patient in a life-threatening condition would receive medical care until the HU ambulance arrives and takes the patient to the appropriate hospital. However, the legislation on the intervention area of the SK ambulance service is a barrier to such cases.

Slovakia does not have a single ambulance service, but there are both a private ambulance service, FALK, and a public ambulance service operating. In Hungary, a single national ambulance service is responsible for rescue work. Three questions relating to the rescue incident need to be clarified. First, the issue of data protection and data security in the care of a foreign citizen needs to be addressed. Currently, data are temporarily registered and then the health data are managed by the EESZT (Electronic Health Service Space) in Hungary. The ambulance service is only responsible for uploading data, but cannot see the uploaded information. This is planned to be changed in the future. In the hospital structure, on the other hand, all data will be accessible. These data protection barriers also exist in telemedicine. Secondly, the issue of the adequacy of travel documents and transport to the right hospital needs to be clarified: where patients can be admitted, where are the available capacities and expertise.

Third, an approximation of practice is needed on the different organisational structures, funding, the system of rescue units, time limits for arrival on the scene, border crossing procedures, operating licences, use of distinctive signs, administrative-technical conditions, emergency call centres, radio systems, language factors, openness to cooperation.

For ambulances to cross the border, all derogations must be addressed in order of priority

Solutions must be found to all care-related issues:

- obtaining authorisation is a priority, because it is essential that the intervention is legal as a health care provider: to enter a foreign territory with own equipment, own medication (some

of them are connected to prior license), own procedures (different licenses, different equipment of ambulances, different institutional structure);

- the issue of funding - base funding - planning the annual budget of the ambulance service (which does not include trips abroad); returning to a system of lump sum payments for interventions as it was in the past might be a solution;
- the issue of data management (currently there is no strict reporting obligation, but it is given in the emergency management system where the patient is sent); there is a contradiction between the Slovak Act on the Emergency Medical Service (n. 579/2004) and the GDPR law (some patients after being intervened refuse to provide their personal documents with reference on the GDPR, which would be mandatory by the first act);
- interoperability of databases (currently care recording is done on a tablet - the database contains information about the route, staff, care) - but the BNO code is an international standard; the database must contain retrievable data (PDF is not suitable for this), because the comparability of operational figures is the only basis for creating a common rescue map;
- a consultation system should be set up: a common interface is essential for findings and final reports;
- standardisation of job descriptions is proposed, recognition of paramedic qualifications is not ensured on the Slovak side;
- joint management of mass incidents and disasters (first responder principle);
- patient placement: depends on the capacity of hospitals, effective prevention requires advance planning and rescue organisation.

Emergency call integration can enable cross-border rescue

The emergency call system (112) works throughout the EU, but due to telephone operator coverage, calls arrive in the opposite country at certain border points, which can cause legal and linguistic problems. The communication between the dispatchers could follow the Austrian model, where dispatchers on both sides can see on their own maps where ambulances are in real time and alert the dispatcher on the other side if their vehicle is closer to the scene. Information can be exchanged quickly using chat and translation software.

Language barrier in the transfer of medical records

In Hungary, patients have the right to receive documentation in their native language that they can understand. Standardisation is needed to ensure uniform language use. At present, patient documentation is done on a tablet, and the the patient can download it once from the data warehouse and the doctor can access in the hospital (e.g. in Austria, printing is done on the spot).

Obstacles on the road to the European Health Data Repository

Member States have implemented EU legislation on patient data in different ways. A common database system requires clarification of the fundamental rights conditions (a validation system for the data space must be developed).

Interoperability requires the implementation of basic developments, i.e. the construction of data transfer gateways between cooperating countries and the availability of structured data. At present, only PDF files are available in the Hungarian EESZT system, which cannot be used to produce

statistics. In the course of the development, the format in which the data can be shared, the module and the audit to be assigned to it should be examined.

There is a need for convergence between Member States in the area of common structures, capacity building (as additional capacity/expertise is needed to provide data outwards).

Agreements are needed for emergency cases in the border region, where the location of the hospital should be given a priority.

Data management barriers to joint software development

The EU's objective is to develop the common technical conditions to ensure that software are developed properly. The development will require defining the scope of valid data, so that when someone crosses the border they can be treated in the same way and be diagnostically interpretable in another country. For example, there are a lot of subjective texts in the final reports today, which could be addressed by selecting texts that include suggestions, but also by using a selection method for the assessment of the situation. Software improvements are not possible without a common structure. It is essential to identify which laboratory methods are used by Member States, which methods are used for measurement, what common training is possible.

3.3 Tourism

Different structures, regulations

1. In Hungary, the coordination of tourism interventions is centralised through the Hungarian Tourism Agency. Currently there is no regulation concerning tourism management, there is no territorial tourism management system. In Hungary, the lack of a comprehensive management structure and legislative embedding is an obstacle to development. The legal framework is not in place for the DMO system to work and for tourism to be managed at local level.
2. In Slovakia, a two-tier system has been established, following the Austrian model: regional and local-level DMOs have been established, with financial support from the state budget through the State Tourism Support Fund.
3. The significance of the destination management model is that it has put tourism performance, previously vulnerable to change, on a steadily increasing development path. Due to regulatory and funding shortcomings, this advantage cannot be exploited on the Hungarian side.
4. It is also advisable to agree on a joint destination management approach across borders, as there are significant differences in the regulatory background of the various tourism sub-sectors. For example, there are different regulations on the technical and licensing conditions for water tour guides, different qualifications, and different systems for their recognition.

Difficulties and obstacles related to tourism development and projects

1. Tourism development through projects is rarely sustainable. It is difficult to create a network of spot-like developments. Therefore, it is advisable to implement developments in an integrated way, adapted to cross-border destinations.

2. If developments are not sustainable, tourism is not resilient (e.g. climate change and pandemics have a strong impact on tourism). Only a flexible and intensively communicating organisation can react to global trends. This challenge cannot be tackled within the current structures, neither within national confines, nor across borders.
3. Success can be guaranteed by a common tourism brand, based on market-based management and grassroots initiatives, which provide a high degree of protection against market changes and unexpected global events. Each brand is only as good as the stakeholders who can identify with it. This identification factor is a particularly sensitive issue in a cross-border context.
4. For the development of cross-border destinations, bilingualism, the use of different means of payment, and the harmonisation of technical conditions and financing schemes represent an increased administrative burden.
5. Based on the interviews, the Slovak side would like to adapt the online aggregated database model of the Hungarian National Tourism Data Centre (NTAK) and the good practice of tourism digitisation. This would require amendments to the Slovak Tourism Act. This has already been done on the Hungarian side and has led to whitening of the sector. Hungary collects more visitor data than Slovakia. Hungary tracks the length of stay, gender of visitors, country of origin, visitor spending, etc., and generates aggregated data. Subsequently, Hungarian tourism marketing is built on the processed data. On the contrary, Slovakia tracks less data on visitors. Slovakia is interested in creating a common system of cross-border registration mechanisms for Slovak and Hungarian tourists, respectively.

Lack of coordination of development concepts

1. Currently is not fully known which cycling routes have been built and signposted on the Slovak side (this does not apply to hiking and water tour stops).
2. All sub-sectors lack a data exchange interface, a database where tourism data can be monitored. This would be in the interest of institutions, local actors and users alike.
3. The tours and maps stop at the border. The content of the supporting applications developed in the framework of small projects is updated by the partners only until the end of the maintenance period. With the rapid technological development, these databases should be updated annually, which is not possible in the framework of a single project. The existing databases should be extended to include cross-border aspects.
4. The Slovak side would like to follow the model of the Kisfaludy Programme support scheme.

3.4 Agriculture

Obstacles to the cross-border marketing of local products

Regulation (EC) No 852/2004 on the hygiene of foodstuff lays down the definition of a basic product and a processed product and provides for facilitations for direct contact between producer and consumer when the food chain is shortened. Other qualifying criteria are small quantities and marginal, local and limited activity. The detailed rules are left to the Member States, resulting in different rules. A common solution could be for each state to regulate the marketing of local products within a certain distance, or two or more countries to conclude an agreement on the subject to boost rural tourism. Another important aspect is that quality assurance should be regulated by EU rules, so that local products are marketed as local products and not as goods that are labelled by traders

(guarantees are needed). Another problem in cross-border relations is the different VAT content. A new business model is needed for local product markets: this requires regulated traceability and a quality assurance system.

Interoperability of training

In the context of examining the interoperability of dual training, it is worth paying attention to the interoperability of agricultural vocational training, which is currently not resolved.

3.5 Commercial cooperation

Administrative barriers due to the different structures

While in Hungary all regional chambers of commerce and industry are independent legal entities, Slovakia has a centralised system, all decisions are taken in Bratislava, and the regional chambers are subordinate, not independent. The administration is therefore extremely slow. Accordingly, the number of voluntary members on the Slovak side is very low. In the database of the District Chamber of Košice, there are only 80 voluntary members. Due to the compulsory registration with the Chamber, the Hungarian Chambers have 40,000 members nationwide. On the Hungarian side, SMEs can be searched by Single Activity Classification System TEÁOR number. It would be useful to harmonise the databases in order to ensure the cooperation and traceability of SMEs.
During the Slovak interview it became clear that the Chamber in Košice would support compulsory membership on the Slovak side as well.

3.6 Employment

Gaps in harmonisation

In the area of labour law, the EU complements the policy work of individual EU countries by setting minimum standards. At the same time, national provisions on contracting, taxation and financing have not yet been harmonised, bureaucratic procedures are unclear and there is a lack of common administrative mechanisms, creating uncertainty for employers and workers in border regions. The European Labour Authority (ELA) is an EU body that mediates, but only between public authorities and does not address the problem of individuals.

Different rates of contributions

Employers have an interest in having the right number of quality workers at the right time. The employee side is in a disadvantaged position in Hungary, with a system of contributions, social security and pension contributions hovering around 30% than 20 years ago.

Approximation, regularity check in the difference between employment modes

The aim of recruitment agencies is to set up recruitment and hiring practices based on the regulations of the country of establishment. However, a number of loopholes have been created in the border region, the legacy of which is questionable.

Currently, a company based in Slovakia can make a contract with a Hungarian company to supply labour in such a way that the Slovak workers are not employed, but are only seconded.

Another obstacle is the self-employed nature of the so-called "dohoda" system, which is a simplified employment scheme mixed with self-employed status. Those involved pay tax of €200 per year, so it is not an employment relationship under the general labour law. A new trend is that not only Slovak citizens are now employed under this scheme, but in several cases citizens from Győr have also been included in the dohoda scheme to work back to Hungary under Slovak conditions, as they do not have to pay taxes and contributions.

It is also worth mentioning the atypical work models, as they can attract people with the right skills/qualifications to the labour market, but who work only part-time. There is a strong tradition of atypical work in Hungary, with the support of the School Association, the Pensioners' Association and the Maternity Association. In addition to simplified employment, the associations receive a contribution reduction. These models are underdeveloped on the Slovak side which might make the parallel employment difficult.

Lack of interoperability between vocational training, recognition of licences and certificates

Full recognition of qualifications and skills related to vocational training would support labour market interoperability. At present, Hungarian rules on recognition of professions are much stricter than those in Slovakia. A solution could be to shift some of the responsibilities for certain qualifications and certificates to the workers. For example, the acceptance and translation of a forklift truck driver's licence could be simplified by calling in a Hungarian examiner to validate the qualification on the spot instead of an exam centre. This would be faster, simpler and less costly than the current practice. Today, months are needed to professional familiarisation, examinations by hours, differentiation by exam results. The same practice works for other professions (e.g. electrician), where there is a degree of interoperability in the use of certain tools.

Language barrier

It is difficult to find Hungarian workers who do not have a language barrier which causes understaffing on the Slovak side. The language barrier (in the field of education) could be overcome through special international teaching (in English), which would provide a uniform foreign-certified curriculum.

Mutual information of employees

Providing information to the Hungarian citizens about the types and conditions of employment contracts in Slovakia is necessary. They often do not know that there is an employment contract and an agreement on employment activities. Employers from Hungary often inquire about gross, net, and hourly wages in Slovakia.

Facilitating access to social benefits

Women from Štúrovo who went to the clinic in Esztergom to give birth had a problem with the application of benefits for the birth of a child in Slovakia. The Hungarian side did not want to issue them a document stating that they did not apply for any benefits there, so the women needed to solve the problem based on good personal relations.

3.7 Social services

Inefficiencies in cross-border social service provision

Cross-border social services can only be provided separately on both sides of the border, because the current legal framework does not support cross-border services (e.g. kitchen, laundry services). They could operate on a market basis, but social services are not common to be operated on a market-based mechanism in most of the cases. In the case of catering services, e.g. institutional food services, national rules are different. It is also a crucial point whether state norms can be used to finance services provided abroad by the service providers. Minibus transport services for the elderly can be provided cross-border, but health services cannot (they can only be provided by a patient transport service with a special permit, even if it is a local service).

Lack of regulation on the Slovak side on family and child welfare

There are differences in the two countries' family and child welfare service systems. The relevant training has already launched on the Slovak side, but the institutional system is underdeveloped and has not yet yielded results. Domestic help is provided on both sides, but there are different levels in Hungary. A possible solution for the organisation of cross-border services could be to start a consultation process with the aid organisations on both sides of the border. A suggestion was made to have separate rules for cross-border services.

Training is not accredited

Hungarian language courses in Slovak colleges are not accredited. Social qualifications and diplomas are not recognised by the Hungarian Education Office. This causes serious damage to Hungarian-speaking professionals, and legal proceedings are underway. Slovak higher education institutions have accreditation for Slovak language courses, but not yet for Hungarian language courses.

There is a difference in the number of hours for the training of social care workers (formerly in the framework of a National Training Directory (OKJ), now in the framework of adult education): while on the Hungarian side, the length of training is 1000 hours, on the Slovakian side it includes 220 hours.

As there is a shortage of social workers, employers in Hungary have to bear extra costs when they want to act as a training centre within the dual training system to ensure the supply of new staff, as this generates an extra cost of around 10 million HUF. Training capacities are currently in a two-year delay behind the demand. It would be worthwhile to carry out a kind of review at the ministerial level and provide support in the area of shortage occupations.

Diversity of social security (social insurance) schemes

Cross-border services are feasible on a market basis, but if they also affect social security systems, e.g. when services are prescribed and recommended by a specialist and should be financed on a social security basis, it makes a barrier.

In the area of social care, the only obstacle in the area of health care is the different social security aspects and funding. However, the screening bus service in Hungary requires the collection of data on Slovak citizens for the purpose of sending the results to the patients later, which raises data protection concerns.

It is important to point out that while there are several private health insurance companies in Slovakia, there is only a public one in Hungary.

3.8 Education

Maintaining educational cooperation for cross-border town twinning

On the Hungarian side, before the current system operated by the state authorities, there was a municipal maintenance system, thus cooperation between schools was in harmony with the municipal level twinning system. It would be in the interest of the school district to maintain these relations. It would be useful to provide additional funding for networking between schools. Visits are costly, with limited grant funding available which prevent more intensive contact and communication. Cross-border town twinning arrangements would guarantee how and from what source and under what rules cooperation in different sectors can take place. It would also be useful to ensure bilingualism in cross-border school districts, which would help to improve the supply of the necessary skills.

Involving Slovak stakeholders in Hungarian cooperation on guardianship

In Hungary, the child protection system service currently operates in the form of a round table, which is based on a very complex model: the protection system officer operates at the municipal level, the adviser is available at the district level, the government office coordinates, and the national level performs methodological tasks. The municipal level facilitates the participation of NGOs and private individuals in the prevention system and provides professional assistance. Other cooperating authorities are the guardianship office and the police. As many Slovak pupils attend the school in Hungary, cooperation with the Slovak authorities is necessary in the case of cross-border students.

Difference in the duration of compulsory education

The conditions and duration of compulsory education in Slovakia and Hungary differ. Slovak pupils can study in Hungarian institutions within a regulated framework and can also attend secondary school if they meet the admission criteria. Although the duration of compulsory education is longer in Slovakia (10 years), this is not a problem in practice: Hungarian students attending Slovak primary and secondary education institutions can study for an extra year at the Balassi Institute. At the same time, they are also obliged to take the Slovak language graduation.

Classification of children with special educational needs (SEN), interoperability of expert diagnosis

There is currently no common cross-border solution to the growing number of children with special educational needs, which is a problem when families move from Hungary to Slovakia or vice versa. In these cases, a new assessment and diagnosis scheme is needed, even though an expert opinion is already available from the other side and the child's competences are known. Another drawback in this area is that the training of professionals in Slovakia is still in its infancy compared to the Hungarian practice. Only universities offer such training. Cross-border obstacles may be eliminated by J. Selye University (Komárno) which is currently planning to launch a relevant training.

The rules on funding for children with SEN changed on the Slovak side in 2023: previously, schools had an integrated set of documents under the guidance of an educational adviser (which allowed for

curriculum changes) and an increased head quota (each child with SEN counted as two). This was abolished in the context of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) funding and replaced by a package of programs called inclusion, which means that all children with special educational needs are developed together, regardless of the type of dysfunction, and the teacher has to develop a coherent curriculum. Under the new rule, schools can apply for a special grant for inclusion instead of a capitation grant, which creates an extra administrative burden, and the grant will only last as long as the recovery fund is available.

Common terminology, different naturalisation processes of diplomas

Specialists for SEN are called special educators in Slovakia, in Hungary they are called developmental/pedagogical teachers. Overall, it would be useful to draw up a Hungarian-Slovak terminology in the field of education, because there are many different concepts in the two countries.

The recognition of diplomas is also complicated, as the two countries have different systems. Many Hungarian students (from the Komárom, Tata, Tatabánya, Győr areas) reported problems with recognition of their diplomas. The Slovak regulations are more relaxed in this respect, and it is worth starting to approximate them with the Hungarian counterparts.

3.9 Territorial cooperation

Coordination of development plans on a cross-border basis

Although the coordination of development plans and strategies has been discussed several times at V4 level, the coordination of spatial development plans at the governmental level is still not solved bilaterally, and in many cases only project-based attempts are observed, with different territorial levels of participation.

3.10 Environment

Cross-border air and product pollution

Pollutants from the cement factory in Turňa nad Bodvou (SK) are blown by the wind into the Bódva Valley on the Hungarian side. In connection with the expansion of the capacity of the Turňa nad Bodvou cement plant (which will be heated with waste), the competent Hungarian ministry has entered the procedure and the government office has also been involved. The Aggtelek National Park has issued an opinion in response to the Hungarian Ministry's request, confirming that the nature reserve is also affected by pollution due to the north-south wind direction. However, the National Park is not an authority, but a nature conservation management body, i.e. it provides data and opinion, but has no authority powers (only the Nature Conservation Guard Service can act as an authority).

The topic was on the agenda of the last council meeting of the Slovak Karst National Park Directorate, and efforts were made to prevent the capacity expansion at the factory, but the market/political decision overrode this. Samples taken during the current operation are tested in independent laboratories in Switzerland. An EIA (environmental impact assessment) is being carried out by the Slovak side as part of a project, but an international impact assessment would be needed. Contaminants are already present in milk, meat, eggs and could multiply after the capacity expansion.

During the Slovak licensing process, it was expected that the Slovak contractor would carry out regular measurements, but unfortunately these are not taken place as expected.

Cross-border pollution - insufficient exchange of information and data

Year after year, the waste (mainly plastic and PET bottles) collected by Slovak rivers, when the Rivers Tisza and Bodrog flood causes a cross-border problem. The Hungarian government agency is responsible for the clean-up, collection and transport of the waste, but due to the lack of information and competence, the role and responsibility of the Slovak side is not investigated. In practice, the government agencies have almost no competence to take action against foreign pollutants, so it is not possible to process the data of the foreign national concerned by the action and to receive personal data transmitted from abroad.

3.11 Water management

Approximation of procedures for planning, authorisation, consents

The Hungarian-Slovak Border Water Committee meets regularly on the basis of the MT Decree 55/1978 (XII. 10.). An attempt has been made to revise the regulation, but on the Slovak side the partners change frequently, making it difficult to amend. There is good cooperation in the subcommittees, but there is no subcommittee dedicated to navigation, and the issue of border rivers is an unregulated area. There are good professional relations between the partner authorities, but the procedures are sometimes cumbersome. For example, in the case of a project involving a joint facility, the consent of the other party is not obtained directly on the basis of a plan, but is sought by proxy. Thus, there are two channels for dealing with cases, which could be speeded up by providing a one-way solution.

A typical feature of joint developments is that while on the Slovak side everything can be implemented on the basis of an installation permit, on the Hungarian side an implementation plan is required. This difference prevented, for example, the construction of the Dobrohošť-Dunakiliti cycle bridge.

Different measurement methods, data

There is a difference in the way the relevant flood level is determined: the calculation methods are different and each party insists on their own method. The different measurement methodologies for ecological water levels, minimum navigable stage and river clarity yield different results. There is a need to harmonise sediment measurements (different floated and rolled) because different instruments and methods give different results. The list of compounds has changed at EU level, but not all national laboratories meet the criteria. It is worth investigating whether harmonised measurements common to all alluvial are feasible.

The different status of water bodies is due to the permissive nature of the Water Framework Directive, which has led to different national rules. Uniform management across the whole Danube River basin would require a clearer EU directive. Currently, differences in river basins are dealt with at the level of the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR).

Different structures, different data management

Rigid decision-making makes problem solving impossible. The legislative/authority level is too rigid (the Ministry of the Interior is the competent authority in Hungary, in Slovakia it is constantly changing, which means that problems arising from discrepancies are often solved only thanks to the flexibility of professionals who have been working together for 30 years).
Different data management systems make cooperation difficult, as on the Hungarian side the data are collected by the water authorities, while on the Slovak side many data are not available due to lack of resources, or data are collected and stored by a market operator (WUVH).
Managing and translating protocols in different languages takes a lot of time in the case of larger planning documents.

Barriers to the development of joint projects

In the inland waterway project (TEN-T line), the Hungarian section from Mohács to Szob is completed, but the EU withdrew the project from Slovakia. They cannot apply for funding in INTERREG SK-HU due to the lack of a relevant priority and as they are excluded from the list of beneficiaries.

Cross-border water protection, missing sewerage network

The Slovak Republic does not yet have a sewerage system built to EU standards throughout its territory. This is due to a lack of resources and the high number of small local municipalities which cannot prepare water investment projects or have the financial resources to co-finance these projects. Neither East Slovak Water Company (VVS) is unable to cover the whole territory of the country in terms of investment.

The Constitution of the Slovak Republic (amendment of 2014) does not allow for a long-term and continuous supply of drinking water to the Hungarian side, but at the same time the technical capacities of the Slovak waterworks do not allow it either. The Hungarian side is not dependent on drinking water supplies from the territory of Slovakia, but in the case of exceptional situations such as flooding of water resources, efforts have been made in the past to establish a contract that would allow for the provision of Slovak water resources to the Hungarian side in this exceptional situation.

3.12 Disaster management

Administrative structure stands in the way of cooperation and project development

Cooperation is hampered by the fact that in Slovakia, professional disaster management bodies established by law have legal personality but they are not interested in cooperation and they lack resources, while voluntary bodies have a will to cooperate but they miss the relevant legal basis and legal personality. They are hesitant to request a tax number, being afraid of losing financial support from the central budget.

Barriers to the application of internationally agreed phases of disaster management

1. Prevention activities (e.g. monitoring or dam reinforcement) are carried out by professional disaster management bodies, which do not involve volunteers. The activity involves several sectors (e.g. water).

2. Preparation should be continuous, joint, local, but due to the significant lack of resources it is not local and not harmonised (e.g. for cross-border assistance, very broad, joint preparation across sectors is needed).
3. The intervention is governed by active bilateral agreements, but its effectiveness depends on successful joint preparation.

Standardisation of disaster management methods, certifications

Local training courses are similar in national and local conventions, but the activities do not overlap, so it would be advisable to harmonise the training systems and define minimum standards. The international certification scheme is also based on several criteria, depending on the capacity of the organisation (deployment of a field hospital in a disaster zone, urban search and rescue, forest fire, chemical, biological emergency drone reconnaissance). Certification can be obtained with the commitment of the Member States, without which voluntary bodies will not be certified. Regionally defined standards (e.g. Danube Region Strategy minimum standard, not defined under UN or EU) can provide a solution, defining a sufficient level of service. On this basis, an expectation system should be clarified, a cross-border aspect should be established and a regional level rating should be developed. The national level certification in Hungary is carried out by the National Directorate General for Disaster Management, while the volunteer rescue organisations can obtain certification at county level under a different system, which is done by completing courses according to a set system of expectations, focusing on national deployability. In Slovakia, the background for national certification is provided for fire brigades, but not for other rescue organisations.

Identification of responsible levels, creation of a legal basis for cross-border cooperation

It is important to clearly identify the levels of intervention and to establish a legal basis, as bilateral agreements are concluded at national level, but joint rescue can only be achieved through local cooperation. There is currently a lack of cooperation on international and national levels, which could be addressed in a regional context. There is openness to cross-border cooperation and mutual assistance, but this requires a regional platform and a bottom-up approach.

3.13 Waste management

Waste management activities - territorial scope of permits

The National Department for Environment Protection, Nature Protection and Waste Management (Pest County) is responsible for the official control and licensing of waste management activities, and is competent for the licensing of imports from abroad, exports to abroad and transit within the country. The counties have no control over these transports. In practice, in Hungary, the applicant for a permit certifies that there are no grounds for excluding him from transporting the waste. It would be worth examining whether there is a uniform procedure for this on both sides of the border, and how the monitoring is carried out. The territorial scope of the waste management activity (trade, brokering) should also be examined to see whether it is linked to the place of establishment or to the planned activity.

3.14 Nature protection

Approximation of divergent legislation to preserve biodiversity

In order to preserve biodiversity, joint strategic goals should be set by Hungary and Slovakia. Regarding protected fish species (ock cod, sturgeon), there are different regulations: on the Hungarian side, sturgeon is not catchable, on the Slovak side it is. The EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030, adopted in the European Green Deal, highlights the measures to rehabilitate degraded ecosystems, the need to restore free-flowing rivers and address barriers to fish migration. These processes can also be observed on the Slovak-Hungarian stretch of the Danube, where the restoration of the river's ecological corridor is still a top issue due to the operation of the Gabčikovo ladder.

A well-functioning ecological corridor is an important indicator of the ecological integrity of a river system. Preserving the permeability of ecological corridors is a social and economic interest and an obligation under international conventions and national legislation.

The research programme to address this problem will focus on the identification of fish migration routes, which will require the establishment of a comprehensive telemetric monitoring system along the Slovak-Hungarian section of the Danube. By tracking the movements of fish, key habitats for the survival of populations (spawning beds, wintering grounds, etc.) can be identified, and the whereabouts of data-poor endangered fish species (e.g. goatfish) can be located. The decline of critically endangered sturgeon populations in the Danube water system continues despite the effort to protect them. Hungary's active participation in transnational programmes is essentially determined by the establishment and operation of a domestic research infrastructure for monitoring migratory fish species and the population of the sturgeon.

A major obstacle is the very limited number of properly trained professionals, both on the Hungarian and the Slovak sides. A regulatory problem is that there is no legislation on nature conservation and fish management in the border area. The establishment and licensing of monitoring points to support monitoring is a very slow process.

Another serious problem to the conservation of fish species is that large waves from large ships wash the fry ashore where they die. From Gönyű to Budapest, the National Park can determine which stretches of coastline are most affected on the basis of the coastline geometry. In such places, a slowing board or artificial reef can be installed in front of known spawning sites, parallel to the shore, on the basis of the Navigation Rules. No approximation has yet been achieved with regard to noise pollution from ships.

Permeability of ladders

If the ICPDR (International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River) can find a solution to the Iron Gate's permeability, the next issue to be resolved for the protection of sturgeon species could be the scope of the Gabčikovo barrage. Slovakia is determined in this respect: progress has been made in a LIFE project. It would be worthwhile to set up an expert group on the Hungarian side that can link up with the work started on the Slovak side, but this would require the provision of equipment and human resources on the Hungarian side.

A new conservation funding concept for shipping is needed

Fry in the littoral zone is damaged/disturbed by regular waves. Solutions could include speed limits for boats, infrastructure along the coast to protect the littoral, but these solutions would need to be tested. The liability of commercial shipping companies should be regulated to protect the nature. Under the EU Water Framework Directive, the need for nature conservation can be justified by the overriding public interest, and compensation of 1-2% by shipping companies to protect juveniles would be sufficient to restore the damage.

Digital border designation faces administrative hurdles

The digital tracing of the 1995 paper-based designation of the Aggtelek-Domica World Heritage Site has been impossible for 20 years. The World Heritage Management Plan provides guidelines for this, but they have not been harmonised in sectoral legislation. Digital spatial information systems could be used to delineate the boundary (currently the boundary is intersected in the middle of the site). Although UNESCO's complex procedure for boundary modification is suitable, the Hungarian-Slovak issue would require a modification procedure, which Paris is resisting to because it would reduce the extension of the World Heritage area.

3.15 Forestry

Language barriers in administrative proceedings, translation costs

If the authority initiates an immediate procedure ex officio in the case of a natural person who is not a Hungarian citizen or who does not speak Hungarian during his/her stay in Hungary, or if the natural person applies to the Hungarian authority for immediate legal protection, the authority shall ensure that the client is not disadvantaged by his/her lack of knowledge of Hungarian. However, in other cases, a client who does not speak Hungarian may request the authority to consider his/her request in his/her mother tongue or in an intermediary language, but in this case the client will be charged for translation and interpretation costs. If the client makes the request in a language other than Hungarian, the authority will neglect it. If translation does take place, it will slow down the process and make it more costly, and the client may even miss the time limit.

The Slovak "forest user" living in the border area in Slovakia sometimes also owns property in Hungary (e.g. a house or a holiday home). It is worth examining the practices and preparedness of land offices to ensure accessibility.

Different data content, stricter rules on delivery certificates for wood origin verification

As a forestry authority, the nationally competent NÉBIH (National Food Chain Safety Office) is responsible for verifying the origin of timber (Act XXXVII of 2009 on Forestry). The relevant EU legislation (Regulation (EU) No 995/2010 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 October 2010 laying down the obligations of operators who place timber and timber products on the market) has not been implemented in the same way by the two Member States, with the Hungarian rules setting out stricter data content for the delivery certificate than the Slovak side.

Unclear rules on information for forest visitors

The obligation to inform forest visitors is not legally clear (e.g. in case of a ban on forest access, closure, ongoing hunting activities, forestry works, fox culling, beekeeping, etc.). It is not the responsibility of the government agency to check the correctness and legality of the information (signs, notices) provided to forest visitors. It is the responsibility of the forest manager and, if there is one, of the organisation authorised to hunt. Bilingual information would be useful in the border area.

Lack of cooperation on biodiversity, plant diseases

The ratio of agricultural land to forests is reversed in the two countries: In Slovakia, agricultural land is generally more protected, in Hungary these are the forests (from the construction of roads and buildings). Cooperation between partner organisations in the two countries on these issues would be useful. EU expectations, sustainability and management aspects are the same, and the impacts on the Carpathian Basin are felt on both sides (climate change, plant diseases, invasive species, disappearing species, etc.).

4 Summary

4.1 Information to continue the project

The interviews showed that different actors of the same sectors often have a different perspective on the problem at hand, so it is particularly useful to provide stakeholder meetings. The procedures on the legislative and administrative level are more complex and lengthy than the decisions of market operators. The living conditions of citizens living in border regions are affected by both administrative and market conditions. The project should attempt to negotiate and bring the two sectors closer together.

From several interviews, it became clear that cross-border accessibility has improved significantly in recent years, however, there are legal obstacles, the elimination of which would improve the situation in some regions. This applies mainly to the border areas of Bratislava and Košice, where there are already approx. 20,000 people resettled from Slovakia to Hungary due to lower real estate prices. They are the ones demanding the introduction of better public transport across borders. This requires the reassessment of the weight limits of vehicles through some border crossings, which in most cases is set to max. 3.5t and also a change in the value added tax setting for domestic and international bus connections.

Rapid medical assistance is the most common demand of border residents. There is room for considerable improvements in this area. The already accepted contracts on the Slovak-Austrian border or the Slovak-Czech border show solution options.

In both countries, public administration uses the official language. In Hungary translation and interpretation costs are borne by the client, which is not yet managed in practice. In formal procedures, the handling and translation of protocols for major planning documents in different languages takes a lot of time, leading to delays in processes and approvals. During the interviews, it became clear that the obstacles to market-based cooperation are quickly solved by the actors among themselves, without the involvement of the legislator. In many cases, this creates a situation that does not comply with the legislation and creates new, unregulated practices.

According to the interviewees, common glossaries can be a great help in overcoming language barriers in different sectors. Exploring the digital potential (translators can mediate between certain bodies, artificial intelligence solutions can be involved), which could be based on joint IT development, is a major opportunity in this area.

The data structures in the countries are different, the Hungarian side has more data available in several areas than the Slovak side. The example is tourism, the Hungarian side tracks the length of stay, gender, country of origin, visitor spending, etc., and generates aggregated data. Slovak side tracks less data on visitors. Different data management systems make the cooperation difficult. In the case of different measurement methods and different data management and procedures, approximation can be attempted at the legislative level, in the framework of bilateral negotiations.

4.2 Experiences, information outside the project

Several interviewees felt that the range of resources available was very limited, the selected priorities of the programmes were too narrow, many former partners were excluded from the potential pool of applicants, although they worked with local stakeholders on a territorial basis.

Incompatible structures hinder cooperation, organisational structures are incomplete or outdated on most government levels, and contact details are not always updated.

Data are not available in sufficient quantity and are not valid.

Cooperation is more effective in areas where work is carried out through long-standing bilateral agreements or jointly established organisational frameworks. A stable framework has been provided, for example by the Hungarian-Slovak Joint Intergovernmental Committee for cross-border cooperation which was established in 2004 on the basis of the Slovak-Hungarian Convention on cross-border cooperation between local authorities and administrative bodies, in order to implement the Convention. The Joint Committee has been functioning successfully for several years, but has not been convened since 2012. The committee has taken effective steps to resolve administrative and legal obstacles in the border region. The Director of the Slovak Ministry of Interior for Local Self-Government expressed the hope for the continuation of the joint work and looks forward to the convening of the next meeting on the Hungarian side.

4.3 Conclusions for cohesion policy after 2027

The ACCESS project will develop solutions that not only allow easier interoperability between the two countries at territorial level, but also aim to clarify the legal framework for cooperation to facilitate everyday life. Bilateral agreements in different sectors could provide a basis for future joint development and increased mobility. In other areas, specific EU legislation could provide a solution: cross-border marketing of local products could be facilitated by binding EU legislation setting out basic conditions for quality assurance and traceability. In the area of recognition of qualifications, approximation of the recognition of professional qualifications could significantly increase labour market mobility in the border region. The interoperability of a registration database system based on a common basis between the chambers would facilitate cooperation between businesses. The revitalisation of economic relations and rapid market solutions could open up new horizon for innovation, energy efficiency and sustainability.

In the case of project developments, it is worth clarifying the details with the authorities before signing the contract to ensure that the necessary conditions for implementation (permits, plans, financial framework, etc.) are available on both sides. Not all difficulties can be anticipated, but the presentation of good practices already implemented will help partners to prepare themselves. This prevents the unfeasibility of implementing the project on one side, the loss of resources, the impossibility of using and benefiting from the development.

The significant shortage of professionals, particularly in the border region, makes it difficult to implement and sustain cooperation in almost all sectors. Capacity-building and education are needed in the area of suitable professionals, which can be complemented by joint training courses and facilitating their mutual recognition.

In cross-border cooperation, legal guarantees and instruments are the pillars of common development. In some areas the cooperation between Slovakia and Hungary has reached a very high level. The example is water management, where the cooperation is based on international agreements and several-decades regular work in several subcommittees. It underlines the importance of the stable, functional organisational structure as a condition for long-term cooperation. In some areas the cooperation is at a very low level, what is probably caused by the language barrier, but also by different and constantly changing institutional structures.

Administrative barriers can also make cooperation difficult or impossible. A good example for administrative obstacle is the structure of chambers of commerce, where the main difference between the two countries stands in the mandatory registration of the business entity in the chamber on the Hungarian side and only voluntary membership of the business entity on the Slovak side, which makes cooperation difficult. It has to be underlined that to improve cooperation it is necessary to overcome the language barrier.

Particular attention should therefore be paid to the preservation and sustainable functioning of existing institutional frameworks (e.g. agreements), structures (e.g. joint committees) and institutions (e.g. EGTCs). These conditions and frames are the guarantees for effective problem-solving for mutually reinforcing developments.

5 Annex

5.1 List of interviewees

	Sector	Country	Name of interviewee(s)	Organisation of interviewee(s)	Main thematic areas concerned
1	Transport	Hungary	dr. Ágnes Borbélyné Szabó, Zsombor Szabó, Balázs Ács,	Ministry of Construction and Transport, Public Services Directorate	Existing connections; financing; technical parameters, liability issues; language barriers; money management; passenger rights issues; timetable coordination; expert consultations; legislation; weight restrictions
2			Tamás Bálint Szabó	Ministry of Construction and Transport, Head of Department	National and international competence of public services; market access of service providers; technical licensing and standards; prohibition of cabotage
3			dr. Katalin Feketéné dr. Benkó	Nógrád County Government Office	Capacities and existing infrastructure; regulatory environment; demand and value exploration; administrative and personal services; CB Passenger Transport Act; transport safety; cycle path network
4		Slovakia	Radovan Hužvík	IDS Východ s.r.o. Košice	Cross border bus lines; VAT for international bus transport; Last mile project; VOLVO investment near Košice; new integrated bus transport system in the Košice region
5			Peter Reštei	Košice Self-governing Region	Public transport across the Hungarian-Slovak border; VOLVO investment near Košice; investments into rail infrastructure
6			Peter Šulko	Ministry of Transport of the SR - Section of Railway Transport	The situation in the rail crossings at the Slovak- Hungarian border; licenses for train drivers; regional rail lines
7			Ľubomír Lehotský	Children Railway Košice	Conditions for one-off train journeys; licenses for train drivers; difficult legislative-technical processes
8	Health	Hungary	dr. Márta Kovács, Dr. Bernadett Bulyovszky	National Directorate General for Hospitals	Background regulations; IT developments (structured data management); data sharing; common structure; project developments; methodological differences

	Sector	Country	Name of interviewee(s)	Organisation of interviewee(s)	Main thematic areas concerned
9			János Bathó, Pál Golopencza, János Haness, Anett Jova, Balázs Kádár, Zsolt Till	National Ambulance service	Operational structures; emergency intervention; communication; data protection; funding; language barriers; mass casualty; skills
10		Slovakia	Štefan Kertes	Emergency Medical Service Košice	Emergency case after plane crash near Hejce; life-threating situation near border; administrative burden after the intervention
11			Július Pavčo	Operational Centre of the Slovak Emergency Medical Service	Two agreements between Slovakia and Austria, Slovakia and Bohemia;
12	Tourism	Hungary	Sándor Semsei	TDM Association, President	Management activities
13			Gábor Magyarics	Duna-Gerecse Tourism Nonprofit Ltd,. managing director	Project development; cross-border viewpoint network, Duna-Gerecse tourist card
14			Miklós Berencsi	Active and Ecotourism Development Centre, Programme Director	Central experiences of development
15			Márta Fazekas	Hungarian Tourism Agency	Marketing, data management, project development
16		Slovakia	Peter Kľučka	Ministry of Transport of the SR	International cooperation among cycling coordinators in Europe; shared bikes systems;
17			František Morong	Ministry of Transport of the SR	Data collection in tourism in both countries; different structures of destination management in Slovakia and Hungary
18	Agriculture	Hungary	Edina Szomi	National Chamber of Agriculture	Marketing of local products; the Family Farms Act; exhibitions; interoperability of vocational training; VAT rates; agri-tourism; (providing guarantees)
19			Barnabás Heincz	National Chamber of Agriculture	V4 cooperation; joint actions; EU food safety policy
20			Péter Varga	Cibus Hungaricus Foundation	Agreement on the short supply chain; the Digital Producer Market and Digital Agricultural Academy; sharing economy trade; business model design
21			Ágnes Major	Small Steps Association	Regional presence and competence; previous partnership; small-scale food production

	Sector	Country	Name of interviewee(s)	Organisation of interviewee(s)	Main thematic areas concerned
22	Commercial cooperation	Hungary	Ilona Szécsi, Irma Tóth	Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County Chamber of Commerce and Industry	Structural differences; project development; database harmonisation
23		Slovakia	Jana Končeková	Slovak Chamber of commerce and industry	Different structures of chamber commerce; language barriers; insufficient data provided by the Statistical office in Slovakia
24	Employment	Hungary	dr. Viktória Zöld-Nagy	Ministry of National Economy	Labour Support Programme, GINOP; revision of the ELA Regulation; EURES and EU rules on labour mobility
25			Viktor Göltl	WHC	Tax issues; the "dohoda" system; recognition of professions; guest work; atypical work
26		Slovakia	Ida Janíková	Office of Labour and Social Affairs and Family (UPSVaR) Komárno	Lack of information; inquiries and questions from Hungary employers and employees in the Labor office
27	Social services	Hungary	Zoltán Ujlaky	Szob District Family and Child Welfare Centre	Access to family and child welfare services; minibus transport and health care; social worker training and accreditation
28			Gábor Popovics	Pontibus EGTC	Interoperability of social services, insurance, social security interoperability
29	Education	Hungary	Mária Bujdos, Klára Tünde Ureczky, Gábor Oláh, Éva Jobbágy	Sárospatak School District Centre, Sárospatak High School,	Expanding professional and academic contacts; recognition of qualifications and diploma naturalisation; language skills; relocation trends; childcare and signposting; children with special educational needs; conditions for compulsory school attendance; educational terminology; the joint minority committee
30	Territorial cooperation	Hungary	Zsuzsanna Drahos	Ministry of Public Administration and Regional Development	Implementation of the Territorial Agenda 2030; V4+2 strategy objectives; coherence of territorial development plans
31			Viktor Oroszi	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade	Administrative barriers to navigation; PannonRIS service; professional qualification; nature conservation regulations; nature parks; disaster management; guiding; water management cooperation; uniform terminology
32		Slovakia	Naďa Firák Kurilová	Ministry of Interior Affairs of the Slovakia	Situation in the bilateral Slovakian Hungarian committee

	Sector	Country	Name of interviewee(s)	Organisation of interviewee(s)	Main thematic areas concerned
33			Helena Glaser-Opitzová	Statistical Office of the Slovakia	Collaboration on the #ACCESS project; data collection on the local and district level
34	Environment	Hungary	Barnabas Bese	Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County Government Office, Department of Environmental protection, Nature conservation and Waste management	Methodologies and data harmonisation; Meteorological activities; Border water cooperation; Information flow
35	Water management	Hungary	József Németh	North Transdanubian Water Management Directorate	Boundary Waters Commission; communication difficulties; tendering opportunities; language barriers
36			Márton Pesel, Ákos Barabás	General Directorate of Water Management, Hungarian-Slovatian Water Commission	Shipping regulations; methodological differences; data management; development of investment projects
37		Slovakia	Beáta Mihelyová, Ingrid Mydlová	East Slovakia Water Enterprise, Košice	Sewerage system in Slovakia not completed; high fragmentation of the local government in Slovakia; drinking water supply through the border
38			Roman Ivančo	Slovak Water Management Enterprise, branch River basin Hornád	Bilateral water commissions work; extreme flood in the Eastern Slovakia in 2010; plastics in the rivers; water tourism in Tokaj area
39			Vladimír Novák	Ministry of Environment SR, Water Section	Work of the bilateral water commissions;
40	Disaster management	Hungary	Perge Kinga	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Budapest Fire Brigades Association	Training recognition; harmonised preparation; standardisation; need for a regional platform
41	Waste management	Hungary	Tibor Hudák	Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County Government Office, Department of Environental protection, Nature conservation and Waste management	Waste shipment at the border; decision-making process; waste trade
42	Nature protection	Hungary	Balázs Veress, Zsuzsa Hordós-Nagy, Péter Gruber	Aggtelek National Park Directorate	Project implementation and funding; language; different legal and technical regulations; role of working groups; delimitation of boundaries; polluting industry; UNESCO expectations; waste disposal; public procurement

	Sector	Country	Name of interviewee(s)	Organisation of interviewee(s)	Main thematic areas concerned
43			dr. Gábor Gúti	Széchenyi University	Species protection
44	Forestry	Hungary	Sándor Bényei	Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County Government Office, Department of Agriculture, Forestry Division	Interoperable databases; interpretation of EU regulations; bilateral agreement
45			Péter Dobay	Pest County Government Office, Agriculture and Forestry Department	Language barriers in administrative procedures, different information practices for forest users, different harmonisation practices, different racial protection issues