

Promotion of legal accessibility  
across the Slovak-Hungarian border



Obstacle Monitoring

# REFERENCE GROUP WORKSHOPS

## REPORT

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## 1 The role of reference groups within the #ACCESS project

### 1.1 Brief introduction to the #ACCESS project

The #ACCESS strategic project is being implemented under the **Interreg VI-A Hungary-Slovakia Program** under the title "**Promotion of legal accessibility across the Slovak-Hungarian border**" (project ID: HUSK/2301/3.1/010). The lead beneficiary of the project is CESCO in Budapest, and its partner is CESCO Carpathia in Košice. The project is being implemented from May 1, 2023, until April 30, 2029.

The intervention logic of the project is based on two interrelated pillars. The first is **obstacle monitoring**, which aims to systematically identify legal and administrative barriers that hinder everyday life and cooperation across borders. The tools used to achieve this objective are **thematic questionnaires** conducted among the border population, **interviews** with relevant national and local authorities, and **reference group meetings** focusing on urban and regional characteristics. The exploration is accompanied by a **legal background analysis** to shed light on the legal environment and possible solutions for each type of case (e.g., cross-border emergency care, recognition of qualifications, employment and social security, sale of local products).

The second pillar is **obstacle management**, which aims to address the cases identified and reduce obstacles. The project creates platforms for consultation between the relevant organizations, formulates recommendations, develops **proposals for legislative changes** where necessary, and prepares **projects/pilots** aimed at effectively removing obstacles. This is supported by a permanent helpdesk and a transparent database of obstacles and solutions (solution inventory), which also collects reports, relevant legal references, and available best practices.

The project aims to create a **more integrated Slovak-Hungarian cross-border region** and to improve the everyday cross-border mobility and cooperation of citizens, businesses, and institutions by regularly identifying and targeting the removal of persistent legal and administrative barriers. A further objective is to create a replicable model; to develop a methodology and toolkit that can be applied to other European border sections.

The expected outputs include knowledge- and tool-based results, as well as policy and communication materials. The project will publish a public, multilingual database and inventory of solutions on obstacles and possible interventions; prepare recommendation reports and legal and policy proposals for decision-makers; provides regular consultation with the relevant authorities through working groups and reference groups; and operates a permanent helpdesk to support cross-border clients and project owners. Outputs include **awareness-raising campaigns, case studies, events**, and **knowledge resources** (guidelines, summaries) that accelerate the practical implementation of solutions.

## 1.2 Presentation of reference group workshops

### 1.2.1 Alignment

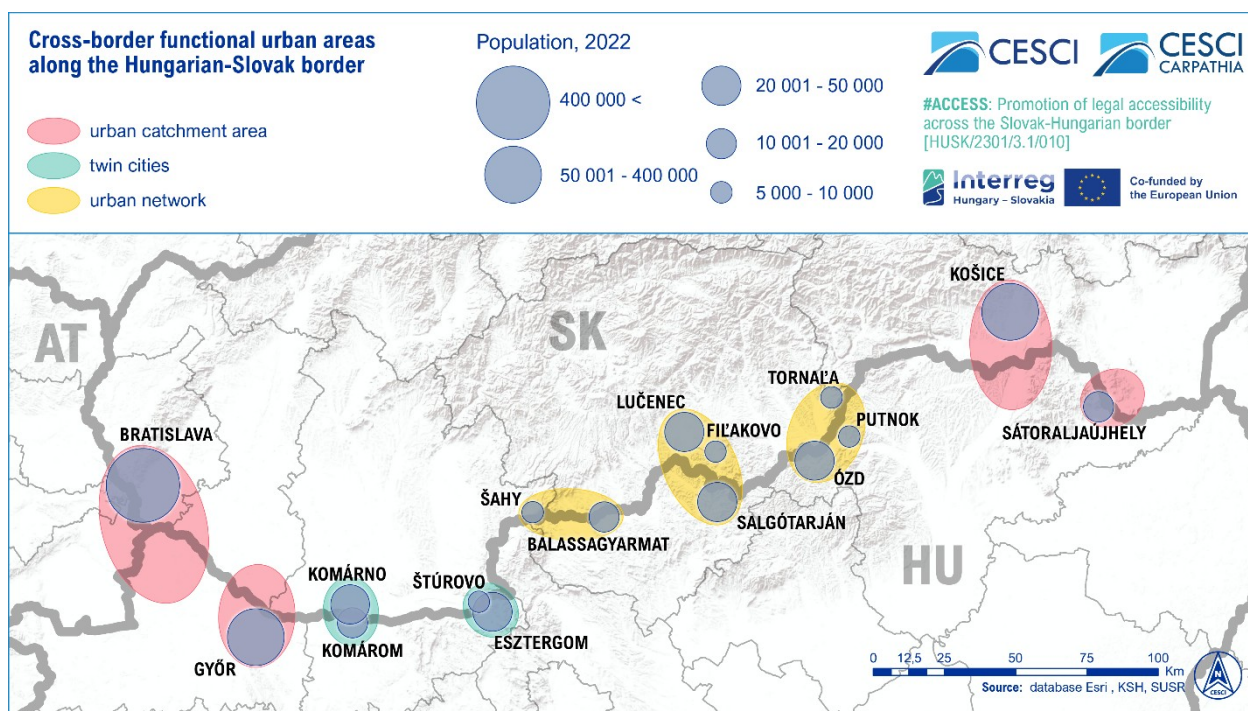
In order to explore the needs of the region in detail, reference group workshops were organized, where local actors had the opportunity to identify the obstacles and difficulties they had encountered. The workshops took place in **cross-border functional urban** areas where, due to **intensive cross-border** movements and interactions, administrative and legal obstacles were most prevalent and have now become commonplace. During the consultations, following the presentation of the project, CESCO experts summarized the characteristics and opportunities of the given border region based on preliminary research, which served as the basis for identifying relevant cross-border obstacles. The meetings **focused** primarily **on establishing dialogue and exchanging ideas** on the topic, during which the experts were able to learn first-hand about the challenges relevant at the local level. After the first (foundational) workshop was held in each urban area, the experts revisited the areas to explore the details of the previously identified topics in greater depth with the participants and to identify further difficulties. In some cases, the information provided by the reference groups **formed the basis for joint integrated developments**.

The project identified a total of nine cross-border functional urban areas along the Hungarian-Slovak border, which the experts visited twice. Due to their characteristics, the areas studied can be divided into three main groups, each characterized by cross-border movements and connections of varying intensity and nature.

- The **urban catchment** area includes areas where there is a city with dominant urban functions on one side of the border. The spatial organizing power of these centers extends into the territory of the neighboring country and influences the processes there. In these cases, a one-way dependency develops towards the city, which is able to provide services to the population of settlements on the other side of the border. Four of the nine identified regions fall into this category. In the case of **Bratislava**, cross-border agglomeration is already clearly evident, and Hungarian settlements close to the border are beginning to function as districts of the Slovak capital (new settlements and residential parks, growing demand for the expansion of public transport connections, etc.). In the case of **Košice**, the development of a cross-border catchment area started later, but with the construction of the M30 motorway and several border crossings, more and more Slovak citizens are appearing in the settlements of Cserehát and Zemplén. In the case of **Győr**, the predominantly Hungarian-speaking settlements of Žitný ostrov are demanding the services of the city in western Hungary, while **Sátoraljaújhely** is developing its natural catchment area in the northern part of Bodrogköz.
- In the case of **twin cities**, we are talking about cities that complement each other functionally, are directly adjacent to each other, and have formed a close bond in their catchment area thanks to their shared history of development. In the case of **Komárom and Komárno**, we are talking about the cooperation of cities with different characteristics. While the southern part of the Danube is a settlement with good transport links and strong industry, the northern side is a city rich in cultural services and institutions. **Esztergom and Štúrovo**, a contiguous twin city area, can rely on their complementary industrial, logistical, and tourist resources, which reinforce each other.
- The cross-border **city network areas** include a group of settlements that are not geographically adjacent to each other, but whose population and resources would enable them to create more and better functions in the region. In the absence of a city with a dynamic

economy, all three regions examined are considered disadvantaged, with population loss and economic decline being common phenomena due to their peripheral nature. In the case of **Šahy and Balassagyarmat**, the rebuilt Ipel' bridges are strengthening the ties between the two cities, while **Salgótarján, Fiľakovo and Lučenec** share a common industrial past, tourism potential, and rail and road connections that are in need of development. The third region consists of the network of towns: **Tornaľa, Putnok and Ózd**, where a similar economic structure, geographical isolation and social challenges are prompting the settlements to establish links.

Figure 1: Cross-border functional urban areas along the Hungarian-Slovak border



**The mayors of the municipalities** belonging to the given urban area were invited to the first round of consultations, and they were mostly joined by municipal administrators with relevant expertise and representatives of important institutions. Their presence ensured that the views and challenges of the local population (and the municipal leadership itself) were taken into account. In the second round of consultations, in addition to the mayors, greater emphasis was placed on addressing **municipal operators, institution managers, and civil organizations**, who contributed topic-specific comments aimed at clarifying the particular obstacle and identifying potential solutions. In addition, **the European Territorial Associations (ETAs)** operating in the region were also invited to the events, as their work focuses specifically on maintaining cross-border cooperation. Their participation was also justified because, in many cases, thanks to their members, they are the only ones with the authority and experience to effectively resolve the obstacles that have emerged.

In addition to local actors, members of the **Joint** Secretariat of the HUSK Interreg program and **delegates** from **national authorities** also took part in the consultations. Representatives of the **Managing Authority** (Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade) and the **National Authority** (Slovak Ministry of Investment, Regional Development and Information Technology) also attended certain workshops, while the Hungarian Ministry of Public Administration and Regional Development was an almost permanent participant in the consultations. The presence of **the program agencies and ministries** ensured that the challenges and experiences identified at the local level ( ) were also

raised to a higher (national) level. This enabled the delegated members to form a holistic picture of the situation in the entire border region and the problems and opportunities of its inhabitants after the workshops.

### 1.2.2 Implementation

The reference group workshops are key elements of the #ACCESS project, as these bilateral meetings ensure that decision-makers, institutions, and service providers in functional urban areas along the border can discuss obstacles and possible solutions directly within a structured framework. The organization and professional content were jointly developed by the two project partners: CESCO in Budapest and CESCO Carpathia in Košice planned all events together, in consultation with local authorities, the relevant Hungarian and Slovak ministries, the Joint Secretariat of the Interreg VI-A Program, and the relevant county/district organizations. Although the content of the workshops was determined in each case by this dual partnership, the project partners divided the organization of the individual workshops among themselves.

The preparation of the workshops followed the same logic at each location. For the first round of workshops, the project partners compiled background material in Hungarian and Slovak, focusing on the designated urban area (twin cities or a group of related Hungarian-Slovak settlements), which provided an overview of regional mobility patterns, institutional/jurisdictional differences, access to public services, border crossing infrastructure, and potential development of project packages. In each case, the invited participants were able to familiarize themselves with the details of this document before the event, and at the beginning of the meetings, they listened to a concise summary presentation that laid the foundation for a substantive discussion. The participants evaluated, commented on, and supplemented the findings of the background material, which greatly contributed to the formation of a complex picture.

The agenda for **the first round** was uniform and followed the same logic at each station. The program opened with greetings from the mayor and government officials, followed by a brief presentation of the project (CESCO Budapest/CESCO Carpathia) and a professional overview of the functional urban area under study based on the background material provided. The second half of the program consisted of a moderated workshop discussion in which participants jointly identified obstacles and possible interventions/project ideas. The professional day typically ended with a joint lunch.

The agenda for **the second round** moved from "exploration" to "towards solution development," but the workshops in the second round also followed a methodologically consistent pattern: after short greetings and project/situation analysis, a block on the 2025 Interreg calls appeared everywhere, followed by a targeted thematic discussion, which was preceded by the presentation of European good practices at several locations. The output logic was also consistent: at each stage, specific project ideas, partnership roles and (where relevant) institutional solutions were recorded.

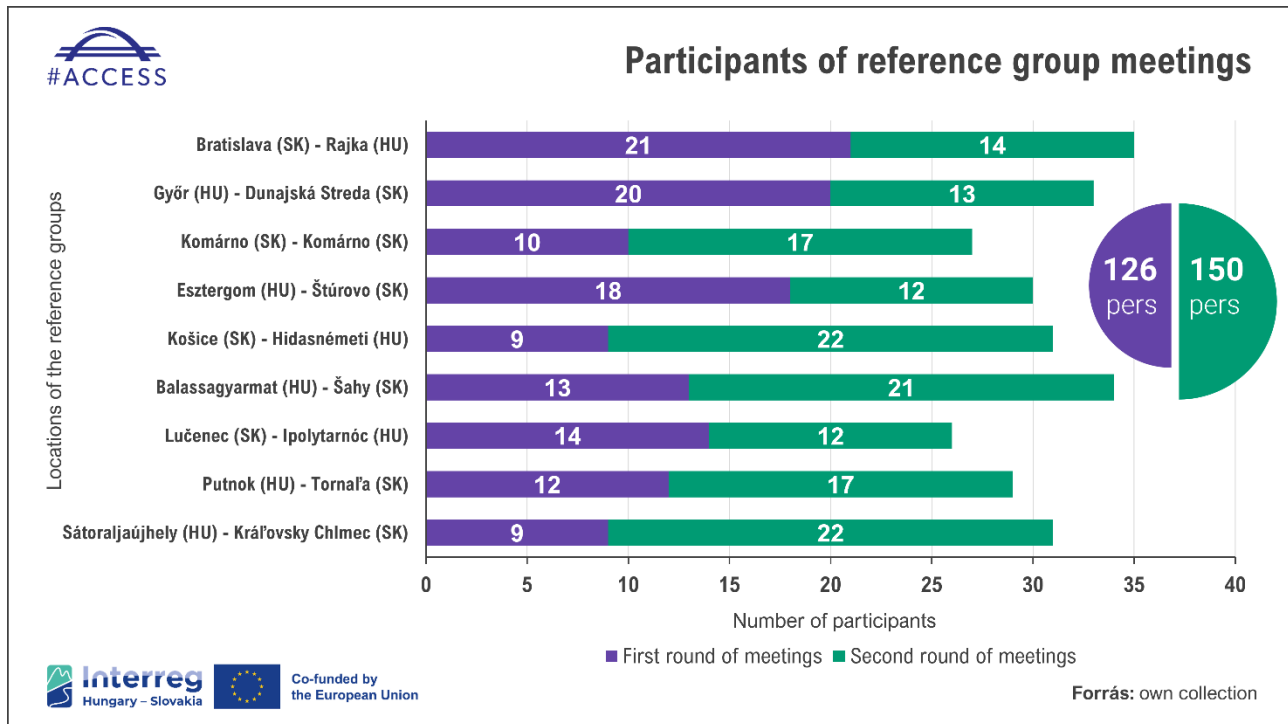
In summary, the aim of the first round was to develop a comprehensive overview and compile lists of problems and project topics; while the second round focused on preparing for implementation (institutional cooperation models, project ideas that could be submitted in response to calls for proposals, sectoral consultations, cross-border coordination).

The venues for the first and second rounds complemented each other: with the exception of Komárno, consultations took place on both the Hungarian and Slovak sides. The organization was conducted in two languages throughout; the moderation and comments were in Hungarian and

Slovak, which was supported by bilingual background materials at the system level. The project partners provided Hungarian-Slovak simultaneous interpretation at the meetings.

A total of 18 workshop discussions were held in two rounds in the nine cross-border urban areas identified above. A total of 126 people participated in the first round and 150 in the second round of consultations. A separate entry was created for each reference group on the project website, containing logistical information about the event, a download link for the background studies prepared in the first round, and reports on the events<sup>1</sup>.

Figure 2: Participants in the reference group workshops



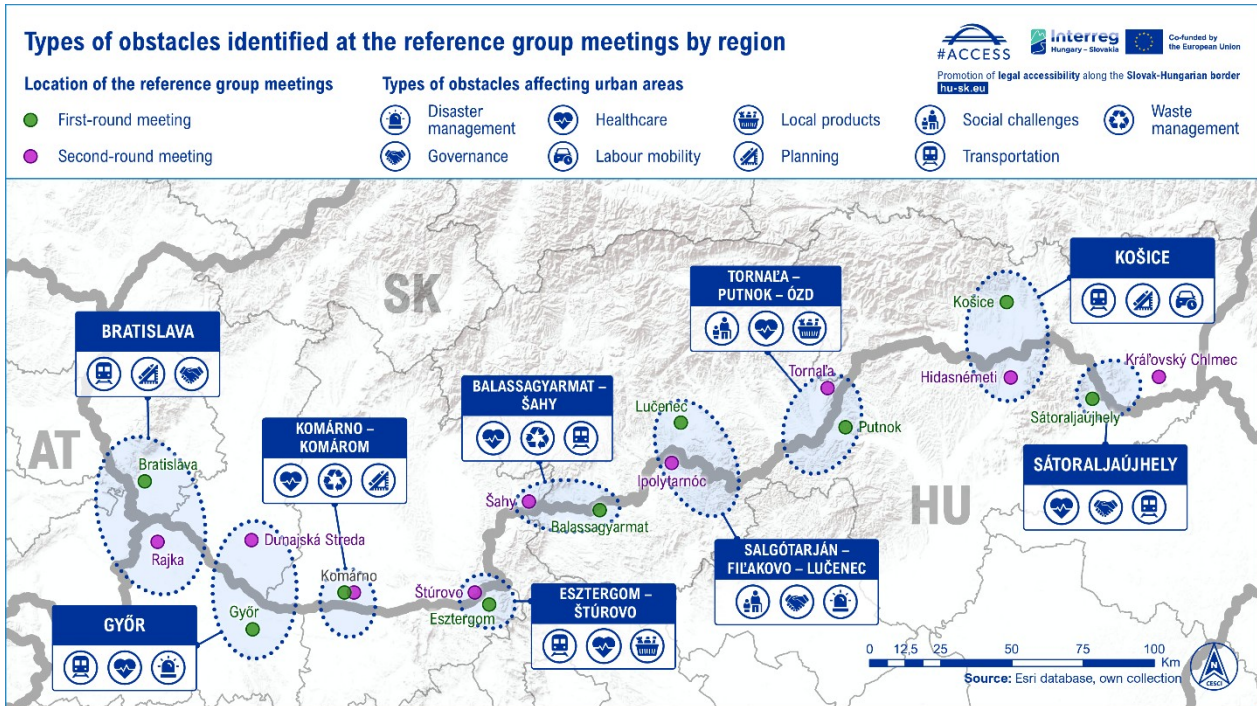
<sup>1</sup> Further information on the individual reference group workshops is available via the links in the appendix.

## 2 Results of the reference groups

### 2.1 Summary of the individual reference group workshops

The following chapter presents the results of the reference group workshops held in the border region. To ensure transparency, the figure below presents the various obstacles affecting event venues and urban areas.

Figure 3: Types of obstacles identified at the reference group meetings by region



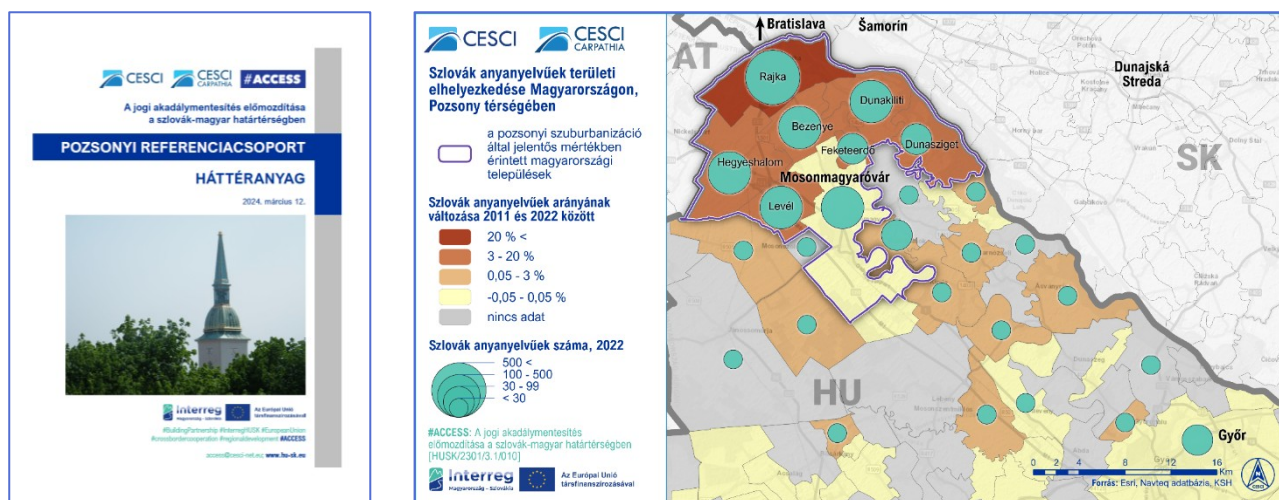
## 2.1.1 Bratislava urban catchment area

### 2.1.1.a First round of reference group workshops: Bratislava

**Location:** Bratislava

**Date:** March 12, 2024

**Organizer:** CESCO Carpathia (P2)



### Summary of the workshop's key findings

Due to shortcomings in Slovak regional development policy, Bratislava has significantly outpaced the rest of the country in terms of development. At the same time, the development of the metropolitan region has not been accompanied by infrastructure development. Access from suburban areas is very difficult, compounded by the almost total lack of **public transport** options from the southern areas. This is the biggest problem for workshop participants. It is clear that even the reintroduction of bus 801 would not be able to address this challenge, as people are continuing to move away. An integrated solution is needed that covers not only public transport but also **cycle** routes. The development of transport also affects students, as they always have to come home with their parents in the afternoon and cannot stay in the city. **Increasing the frequency of train services** is a step in the right direction, and the planned extension of the tram line southwards from Petržalka is also promising. However, this is only a partial solution, as the accessibility of train stations and services should also be ensured for settlements that do not have a train station.

A good example of this is the cooperation established with the Austrian side. With the help of an organization called **BAUM**, the municipal leaders concerned were able to set up a **permanent consultation** forum, where they can regularly discuss their problems and development plans. Thanks to this forum, the issue of transport connections in Hainburg has also been resolved. A similar consultation forum would also be needed with the Hungarian partners, but it might be even better if the Hungarians could join the existing Austrian-Slovak platform, as this could help with the integrated management of problems. A kind of **agglomeration council** could thus be established, provided that the leadership of the capital city of Bratislava is interested in such an initiative.

The Hungarian settlements **do not have any problems with the Slovaks who have moved in**. Although many **of them have not yet registered**, and there are sometimes minor problems with car owners, cooperation between the local authorities and the new residents is functioning well. The settlements make their promotional materials available in Slovak, events involving both communities are held regularly, and some of **those who have moved from Bratislava are actively involved in the life of their new settlement**, with some even participating in the activities of local civil organizations. Many of them already have a good command of Hungarian and use local services (in Rajka, for example, half of the kindergarteners are Slovak). In line with suburbanization processes, however, migrants continue to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the Slovak capital.

Overall, the participants did not report any insurmountable legal obstacles; rather, they would like to **increase the intensity of territorial cooperation** and improve the transport situation.

### 2.1.1.b Second round of reference group workshops: Rajka

**Location:** Rajka

**Date:** October 16, 2024

**Organizer:** CESCO Budapest (LP)



### Summary of the most important findings of the workshop

Due to its specific location, the Bratislava agglomeration has not been able to develop in a healthy manner. Among the challenges arising from this, the **lack of a solution to the transport problem** is the most pressing, affecting both car traffic and public transport. **Adapting the BAUM model**, which has been successful in the Austrian-Slovak context, could be a solution for creating an integrated system. To this end, the BAUM organization was also presented at the meeting.

The cross-regional cooperation between Bratislava and the surrounding Austrian provinces focuses on sustainable spatial development, the establishment of institutional collaboration, the

identification of cross-border obstacles and information exchange, as well as the **cross-border discussion of strategic documents concerning the Bratislava metropolitan area** and the development of joint strategies and projects. The organization, which currently has a project-based maintenance model, **is striving** to achieve a permanent organizational framework and **to extend its area of operation to the entire Bratislava agglomeration**. Accordingly, a new coordinator (liaison person) would be required to manage Hungarian affairs within BAUM. For the sake of simpler operation, those present decided to **apply** the **dual** (Austrian-Slovak and Hungarian-Slovak) **model**, but did not rule out the involvement of the Austrian side in certain areas (see cultural cooperation).

In addition to joining this comprehensive umbrella organization, those present also listed further challenges arising from the cross-border agglomeration of Bratislava. One such challenge is the issue of **spatial planning**. As the amount of available land in the Slovak capital is very limited, new residential parks are being built close to the state border without notifying the municipalities on the other side or asking for their opinion. Further major housing development is expected in the southern part of the city.

In terms of **transport**, the previously suspended **bus service** connecting Rajka and Bratislava **is now operating again**. As a result of a local initiative, the service was launched by a private company. In the absence of additional subsidies, the operator only sells full-price tickets and passes. Although the quality of train transport has improved thanks to developments by GYSEV, Slovak immigrants continue to use their own cars for commuting. The **increased traffic** causes parking problems and serious environmental pollution for the municipalities in the border region. Another problem is **the vehicles left behind** (often without license plates or technical inspection certificates) that spoil the appearance of the settlements, and the **neglected plots of land** whose owners cannot be traced.

**Bilingualism** has been achieved in most settlements, but this has been done on an ad hoc basis, without systematic cooperation. In order to establish communication between the population and the authorities, a dialogue needs to be established between the country and the new citizens (e.g. by means of a joint information booklet explaining the cultural and administrative rules and customs of the country). In addition, difficulties arose in terms of increased **waste management**, **lower tax revenues** relative to the actual population, the growing need for **law enforcement**, and the fact that newcomers do not enroll their children in local **educational** institutions.

Overall, the participants in the consultation **agreed on the extension of the BAUM operating model to Hungary**. The discussion of the specific directions of institutional development was postponed to a subsequent consultation.

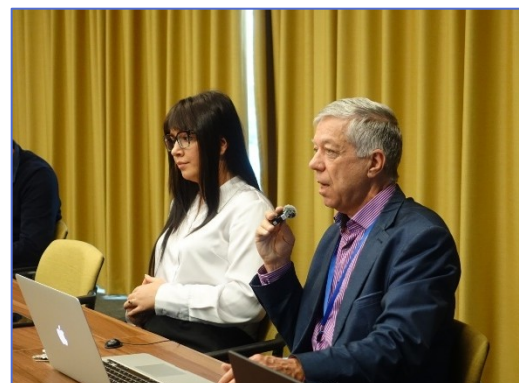
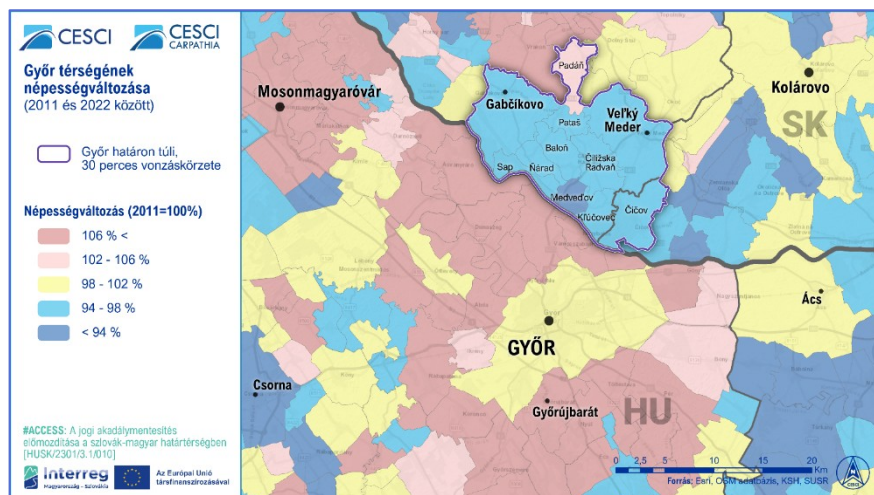
## 2.1.2 Győr urban catchment area

### 2.1.2.a First round reference group workshop: Győr

**Location:** Győr

**Date:** January 25, 2024

**Organizer:** CЕСCI Budapest (LP)



### Summary of the workshop's most important findings

In the case of Győr, demarcation is very problematic, as the city is **extremely rich in functions** (some of which are at the capital city level), and the catchment areas of the individual functions differ significantly from each other. **The inclusion of Dunajská Streda** seems inevitable, as cooperation between Győr and **Dunajská Streda** is becoming increasingly close, and the most important development idea is also linked to them: an expressway between the two cities, via a new bridge in Vámoszabadi.

At the same time, the participants do not consider the development **of public transport** to be realistic in this context, since the failure of the Vel'ky Meder bus service, everyone for whom this connection was important has already found a solution. Employees are transported by large companies in chartered buses, while private individuals travel by carpool if necessary. A needs assessment can be carried out, but it is expected that the population will prefer individual modes of transport.

Due to the landscape and shared cultural heritage, **tourism cooperation** is a priority. A good example of this is Arrabona EGTC's participation in the work of the Csallóköz TDM. However, **the**

**protection of natural heritage** can also be an important area of cooperation. The issue of simplifying the passage of fire trucks and other similar vehicles for **joint disaster management** needs to be resolved.

It is expected that **elderly care** will become an increasingly significant challenge in both countries in the coming decades. However, there are currently legal barriers to the sharing of services, with the exception of commercial solutions.

Arrabona EGTC would also like to address **energy** issues across borders, but this also lacks a legal framework at present.

The first challenge in all cases, however, is to develop **a common vocabulary**. Even at the level of the simplest projects, it is a common problem that terms and definitions do not correspond exactly. In the context of accessibility, it would be worth considering compiling vademecums related to the most common areas of cooperation.

It is also important to mention **the differences in competencies**, which weaken the willingness to cooperate on the Hungarian side.

### 2.1.2.b Second round of reference group workshops: Dunajská Streda

**Location:** Dunajská Streda

**Date:** March 4, 2025

**Organizer:** CESCO Carpathia (P2)



### Summary of the most important findings of the workshop

In addition to the towns of Dunajská Streda and Veľký Meder, the workshop was attended by the mayors of two smaller towns in Hungary and two in Slovakia. Győr was not represented, but Arrabona EGTC participated.

The main problems raised by those present were **of an infrastructural nature**: there is a great need to renovate **the Medved'ov bridge** and, in the event of the construction of **an expressway**, to build a new bridge between Győr and Veľký Meder. Another significant shortcoming is that there are no **bicycle paths** on the Slovak side, and the recent road renovation has made cycling on the main road in question particularly dangerous. This has a negative impact on the region not only in

**terms of** transport but also in terms of **tourism**. Regional cooperation is needed to ensure the systematic and coordinated development of the cycle path network.

There is a need to restart the previously failed **bus service** between Veľký Meder and Győr, with a bus terminal in Dunajská Streda. However, this requires the creation of financing conditions and better coordination of the timetable with other connecting services and the railway.

There is a need for the integration of **healthcare services** in the region, especially for elderly Hungarian patients living on the Slovak side, who would like to be able to communicate with doctors in their native language.

At the same time, **the pull effect of Győr** is already being felt in many areas, for example, **commuting for educational purposes** and migration are disadvantageous for the region. As in other border regions, experience here shows that if a young Hungarian continues their studies on the Hungarian side of the border, they will not return to southern Slovakia, and the community in question will lose them.

Similar to the workshop in Győr, the need for **disaster management cooperation** was also raised here. At the very least, fire trucks should be allowed to cross the border for rescue purposes. A good example of this is the joint police patrols that have been in place for decades in the Hungarian-Slovak border region.

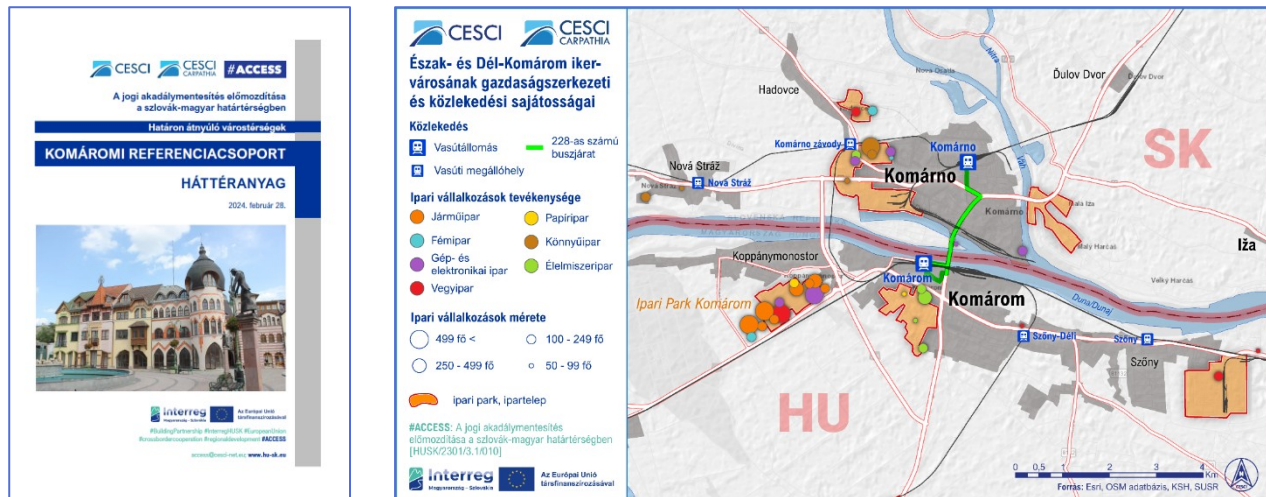
## 2.1.3 Komárno – Komárom twin city region

### 2.1.3.a First round reference group workshop: Komárno

**Location:** Komárno

**Date:** February 28, 2024

**Organizer:** CESCO Carpathia (P2)



### Summary of the most important findings of the workshop

Cooperation between the two cities has been very close since the change of regime, but has been institutionalized at a low level.

They continuously coordinate **their development plans**, which have also given rise to joint ideas. One such idea is the plan for **an international logistics center**, the central element of which would be a large joint port, suitable for intercontinental transport. However, this is currently hampered by differing regulatory frameworks for water transport.

A similar problem arises in terms of **water conservation** due to differing regulations. While illegal construction is currently being demolished on Elizabeth Island in Komárno, a large battery factory has been granted an operating license for the same body of water in Komárom, Hungary. The legal frameworks governing **historical monuments** also differ, which makes it difficult to develop the fortification system jointly.

Komárno built a composting plant for €1.4 million, and kitchen **waste** has been recycled here for a year and a half. They could easily accept similar waste from Komárom, but MOHU is currently planning to build another composting plant in Komárom, which is an unnecessary duplication of

effort. However, the problem is that waste cannot simply be transported across the border, and that MOHU handles the issue at the state level, while in Slovakia it is a municipal task. The question is whether MOHU can be persuaded to cooperate with the city administration of Komárno on this issue, and whether it is possible to transport even kitchen waste across the border (without the risk of infection). This could also be the subject of a major innovation project, as the waste from the two cities (including sewage sludge) could be used to operate a larger-capacity biogas plant, contributing to the city's energy supply.

**The hospital** in Komárno has undergone spectacular development in recent years and has sufficient capacity to serve both cities and the region. The hospital in Komárom, on the other hand, provides a lower level of care, with services similar to those in Komárno only available in Tatabánya. From a financial point of view, it would also be more advantageous to integrate healthcare services, as the MRI examination in Komárno receives funding from the Slovak state to perform a maximum of 10 examinations per day. However, if the Hungarian state were able to reimburse the costs of such treatments for Hungarian patients, a much larger number of examinations could be performed, making better use of the available capacities.

**Educational** mobility can be observed in both directions. A thorough analysis of educational integration issues was recently conducted by the joint minority committee of the two countries. This identified a number of obstacles, e.g., that Hungarian-side professional psychologist and speech therapist diplomas are not recognized in Slovakia, and thus Hungarian professionals cannot provide assistance to Hungarian educational institutions in Slovakia.

When Kombi Bike was established, it was problematic that no insurance company was willing to insure the approximately half a million euros worth of equipment due to its cross-border use. The question is how equipment used on both sides of the border is usually insured in the case of **public transport**, as this could also be a model for public bicycle-sharing systems (it is not known whether this problem also exists with MV Bike).

It would be advisable to set up a **joint development council** consisting of representatives from both cities to ensure smoother cooperation in the area of development. According to the participants, this would actually be necessary if larger joint projects were to be prepared (e.g., the development of the two urban connection areas of the Erzsébet Bridge or the coordinated development of the Danube banks). Without these, coordinating development plans within the city is task enough. At the same time, we consider it necessary to establish a permanent framework for consultation in order to avoid divergent or parallel developments.

### 2.1.3.b Second round of reference group workshops: Komárno

**Location:** Komárno

**Date:** May 15, 2025

**Organizer:** CESCO Budapest (LP)



#### Summary of the most important findings of the workshop

European best practices were presented at the meeting with the aim of exploring opportunities for cooperation between the two cities. Among these, the ZOAST cross-border **health** zone network and Nova Gorica and Gorizia's designation as **European Capitals of Culture** attracted the most attention.

Factors hindering the establishment of **healthcare cooperation** included emergency care, the sharing and storage of IT data, the redeemability of e-prescriptions, exchange rate fluctuations and the harmonization of social security systems. The hospital in Komárno offers attractive services in the fields of oncology, obstetrics, and emergency care, while the hospital in Komárom provides rehabilitation and medical services to residents of the urban area. The twin cities can test and verify the possibilities of Slovak-Hungarian healthcare cooperation within the framework of a pilot project. Based on local experience, the harmonization of technical systems could later be extended to the entire Slovak-Hungarian border region. It is important that the proportionality of reimbursements is always maintained.

The establishment of a **logistics center** is a possible alternative given the presence of the port, the motorway, the railway, and the nearby airport. The port of Komárno is the second largest facility of its kind in Slovakia, but its potential is not being fully exploited. However, with the creation of the north-south transit corridor, the urban area will have to cope with even greater freight traffic, which will require the construction of a new bridge and bypass roads.

The **Danube riverbank** and the most important **brownfield sites** are considered a matter of national importance, as they are the responsibility of the railway, water management and monument protection authorities. Local governments currently have few opportunities to manage these areas.

**Cultural** cooperation is already in place, and all that is needed here is to coordinate tourism management, increase accommodation capacity, and develop the fortification system in a unified manner. In the latter case, the joint acquisition of the EKF title could represent a major step forward. Pons Danubii EGTC could play a key role in these developments.

**Waste management** and the **maintenance of green areas** also offer opportunities for cooperation. The establishment of a joint machine park, the joint maintenance of green areas and

the cooperative use of green waste (e.g., biogas production) could bring financial benefits to the two cities. However, waste management falls under different jurisdictions in the two countries (state in Hungary, municipal in Slovakia), and it is not possible to transport waste across the border.

**Cross-border migration** is becoming increasingly common in the region. Due to the built-up nature of Komárno and the lack of vacant land, many people are moving to the Hungarian side of the Danube and build family homes there.

Overall, there is a bottom-up desire for cooperation in the areas of healthcare and green infrastructure management. A long-term goal is to submit a joint application for the European Capital of Culture, which requires better coordination of tourism systems.

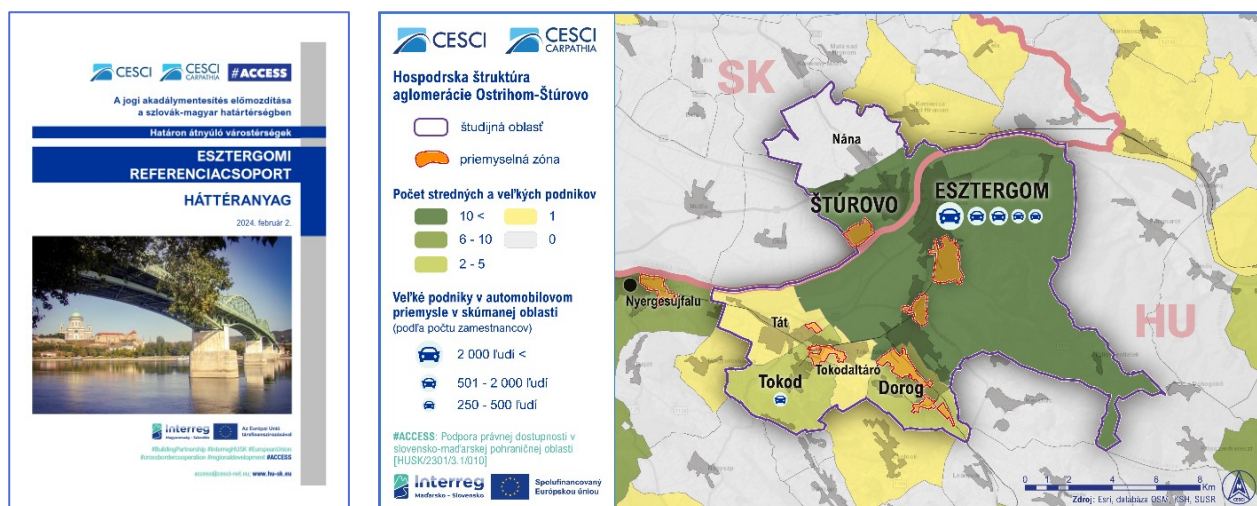
## 2.1.4 Esztergom – Štúrovo twin city region

### 2.1.4.a First round of reference group workshops: Esztergom

**Location:** Esztergom

**Date:** February 2, 2024

**Organizer:** CESCİ Budapest (LP)



### Summary of the workshop's most important findings

The delimitation used in the background material is only relevant on a theoretical level. On the one hand, Dorog and Tokod do not feel that they are border settlements and cannot meaningfully relate to the project. On the other hand, there are numerous functional links between Esztergom and Štúrovo, but their catchment areas naturally differ significantly. While some tasks can be performed at the city level, the scope needs to be significantly expanded in the context of tourism (practically the entire area of the Ister-Granum EGTC belongs here). From an industrial and logistical point of view, it would also be rational to involve Nyergesújfalu. For Štúrovo, it is clear that the factors necessary for its development are available on the Hungarian side, but Esztergom is the most relevant partner in this regard, while the others are not visible.

**Due to the wide range of areas of cooperation, it is likely that a second round of workshops will not be sufficient, but rather that separate sub-workshops will need to be organized at the sectoral level.**

The stakeholders consider **infrastructure developments** to be the most important: the M100 expressway leading to the M1 motorway and the construction of a combined freight bridge

between Štúrovo and Esztergom. This could be linked to the previously initiated **cross-border business and logistics zone**, which is relevant to all seven municipalities (due to the developed industrial capacities). In addition, stakeholders see great potential in the development of the cycle path network, which has rational elements and can be linked to interventions aimed at **expanding the Mária Valéria Bike bike-sharing system**. The latter is perhaps the only successful cross-border project that the two cities are jointly managing after lengthy preparations. Due to differences between the administrative systems of the two countries and local competences, the range of functions that can be performed jointly is very limited. It is more **a question of complementarity and cooperation than integration**.

The simplest thing is to develop tourism cooperation with the involvement of existing DMOs. However, during a personal conversation after the workshop, the mayor of Štúrovo questioned whether it would be possible to introduce a joint spa pass, given the differences in accounting and currency systems (and, of course, business interests). The maximum achievable goal would be to establish a **joint tourism council** with the participation of the DMOs, which could at least prevent the overlapping of major tourist events by creating an **event calendar**.

The **healthcare cooperation** appears exemplary from an external perspective; however, abuses have been observed, and the shortage of doctors also limits the range of services available in Esztergom. In any case, St. Barbara's Hospital already belongs to Esztergom, and closer cooperation with the Polyclinic in Štúrovo could be established if the local government of Nitra County supported it. This would require incentives at the state level.

Legal barriers are the biggest problem for **the Ister-Granum EGTC local product system**. The situation cannot be resolved without state intervention. The issue of the cross-border applicability of regional trademarks may be raised.

Cooperation between firefighters and police forces is adequate, but joint action is also hampered by rules (e.g., in the event of a fire, intervention in a neighboring area is only possible after obtaining permission to transport equipment, which should be simplified; it should be examined whether the **disaster management agreement** could be relaxed in this regard).

CBRM has also appeared in this region: Slovak citizens are moving to the Hungarian side of the border and commuting to work in Štúrovo. Even if they are native Hungarian speakers, administrative procedures remain a challenge for them, as they are unfamiliar with administrative terminology and find it difficult to understand Hungarian forms. It might be useful to develop an easily accessible **online administrative dictionary** or a **multilingual form management system** using artificial intelligence.

### 2.1.4.b Second round of reference group workshops: Štúrovo

**Location:** Štúrovo

**Date:** February 27, 2025

**Organizer:** CESCO Carpathia (P2)



#### Summary of the most important findings of the workshop

Although the border region from Nána to Dorog to Tát is considered a contiguous built-up area, the majority of mayors participating in the first meeting did not see any reason to treat this region as a single entity. As a result, the second round of consultations focused only on the cooperation between the twin cities of **Esztergom and Štúrovo**.

**Tourism challenges** include limited accommodation facilities, varying standards of hospitality (lack of Slovak language skills on the Hungarian side), growing demand for skilled labor, and a lack of tourism training in Slovak. The latter could be addressed by launching bilingual classes or possibly establishing a bilingual school in Esztergom. However, it should be noted that Esztergom already attracts a large number of Hungarian-speaking students from Štúrovo.

**Healthcare cooperation** is exemplary, thanks to the opportunities provided by the Dôvera insurance company, and is unique in the entire Slovak-Hungarian border region. However, there is still room for improvement and expansion of cooperation. One example is enabling cross-border rescue services. As the range of healthcare services available in Štúrovo is very limited, there is a growing demand for services provided by institutions in Esztergom. The growing shortage of doctors and nurses makes it even more necessary to develop the healthcare system in Esztergom and make healthcare more accessible.

According to plans, the border region will be integrated into Hungary's expressway network in the foreseeable future. The **M100 expressway** will connect Esztergom and the M1 motorway, requiring the construction of a new bridge over the Danube. The bridge, which will serve freight traffic, will not only strengthen the connection between the two cities, but will also enable an expressway connection between Štúrovo and Bratislava (via Hungary), and traffic between the Danube Bend and Budapest will also shift in this direction. Both cities must prepare for changes to their transport systems.

Despite its size, Štúrovo maintains **local** bus services, which is a major financial burden for the city. At the same time, the unfavorable location of the railway station makes it inevitable to maintain the service, even though passenger numbers are low, which provides a reason to increase fares.

**The territorial plans** have already been **shared**, and Esztergom forwards the official plans to the leadership of Štúrovo, but no substantive feedback is usually received in this regard.

The participants are committed to maintaining cooperation, in which **Ister-Granum EGTC** plays an important role.

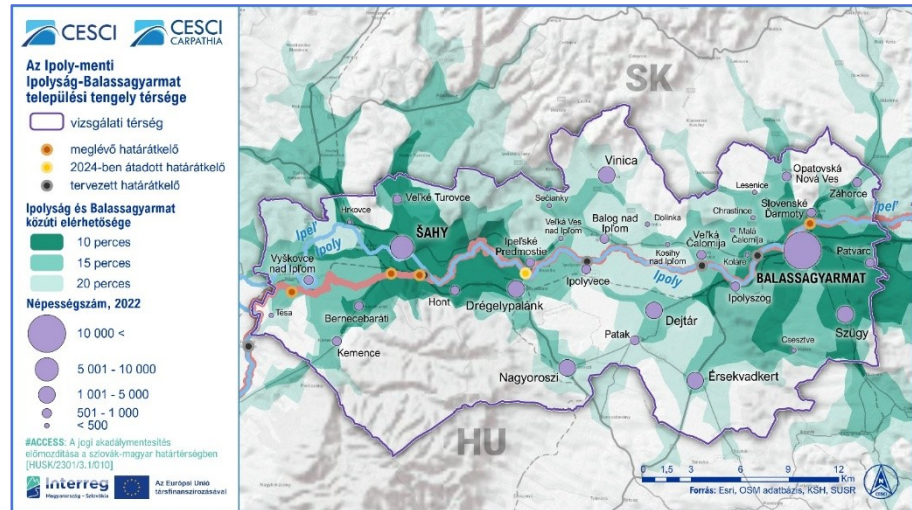
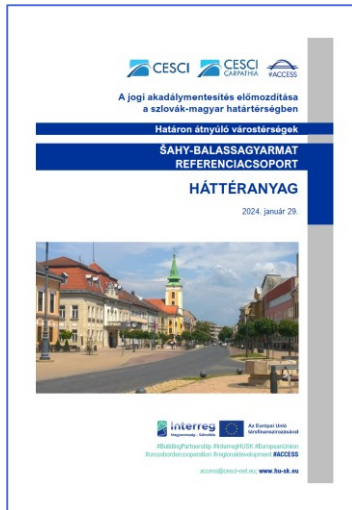
## 2.1.5 Balassagyarmat – Šahy city network area

### 2.1.5.a First round of reference group workshops: Balassagyarmat

**Location:** Balassagyarmat

**Date:** February 6, 2024

**Organizer:** CESC Budapest (LP)



### Summary of the workshop's most important findings

The interdependence of Šahy and Balassagyarmat is beyond question, as recognized by the city leaders, who are striving to cooperate at the strategic level. It is also a fact that the two cities can jointly strengthen their spatial positions vis-à-vis Veľký Krtíš, which is similar in size. At the same time, it has also become clear that complementary functions **do not appear in relation to each other, but in a north-south relationship**, meaning that the Šahy-Balassagyarmat functional axis does not exist and may not even be desirable. What can be strived for is **the parallel development of the functional catchment areas of the two cities**, always taking into account the interests of the neighbor. There is close and friendly cooperation between the two cities and the surrounding settlements, which can be built upon.

One important outcome of the workshop was that it would be worthwhile to organize **focus group discussions** involving citizens in specific life situations (e.g., parents of children attending school across the border; commuting workers; Slovak citizens who have moved to the Hungarian side), as they are the ones who have first-hand information about the obstacles.

**Commuting for work purposes** is primarily observed in the direction of Hungary (8-10% of workers in border towns commute to the Hungarian side for work, covering a fairly large

geographical area: there are even Slovak workers at Samsung in Göd), but factory workers are also transported north from Balassagyarmat, a distance of 30-40 km.

**Secondary schools** on the Hungarian side attract Hungarian-speaking children from southern Slovakia, but no opposite movement can be observed in this area, which can be explained partly by a lack of language skills and partly by the incompatibility between the two school systems (8-year and 9-year primary school systems). Since Slovak students would have to pay tuition fees, they register in Balassagyarmat and are therefore no longer considered commuters.

A few years ago, **the hospital** in Balassagyarmat organized a presentation for mayors from Slovakia living near the border, but even today they can only use the services (semi-)illegally, even though there is a great need for them, and almost every department in the colonial hospital employs staff who speak Slovak. The mayors considered this to be the most pressing issue and signed a memorandum on the matter a few years ago, as the hospital in Veľký Krtíš has deteriorated significantly, while Levice and Lučenec are 70-80 km away. The maternity ward will reopen in the city in March.

**Shopping tourism** is also significant here, with Slovak shoppers generating approximately 30-40% of retail sales in Balassagyarmat; however, there is also consumer mobility in the opposite direction, mainly to Šahy.

A new phenomenon is **CBRM**: more and more people are moving from Šahy to villages on the Hungarian side (they already represent about 10% of the population in Drégelypalánk), because although real estate prices are roughly the same, Šahy has no free land available for parcelling, so those who want to move out of the residential blocks choose the neighboring villages. This mainly causes problems **in waste management**, as these residents continue to pay waste collection fees to Šahy, even though the waste is generated in the villages. On the Slovak side, 20 municipalities have joined forces to address this issue, but it will also need to be resolved on the Hungarian side. It is not clear how this would be legally possible: how can Hungarian municipalities join a Slovak waste management association? Another challenge is the development of **public transport**. Šahy envisages providing bus transport for Slovak citizens who have moved to Kemence, Bernecebaráti, Hont and Drégelypalánk by developing a local transport system (this may not be a good idea). Rail transport has been dismantled on both sides, and there seems to be no chance of rebuilding the missing 6 km section between Drégelypalánk and Šahy. In contrast, steps have been taken in recent years to develop the cycle path network, which is considered an important common issue by everyone. If bus transport cannot be launched, the establishment of a **bicycle sharing** system between Šahy and neighboring settlements (provided that suitable bicycle paths exist) should be considered.

An interesting addition to the workshop was that we learned that there are no obstacles to **hunting**, and that a hunting license can be obtained with an invitation from a hunting association on the other side.

The following topics were proposed as the main themes for the next workshop: **waste management, public safety, healthcare, and transportation** (including the development of interregional connections).

### 2.1.5.b Second round of reference group workshops: Šahy

**Location:** Šahy

**Date:** April 29, 2025

**Organizer:** CESCO Carpathia



#### Summary of the most important findings of the workshop

As a result of the first round of consultations, the next meeting was organized **with a focus on healthcare**, attended by the mayors of Šahy and Balassagyarmat, the head of the healthcare department of Banská Bystrica County, the directors of the hospitals in the three border towns of Šahy, Veľký Krtíš, and Balassagyarmat, and other healthcare professionals. Veľký Krtíš and Balassagyarmat, as well as other healthcare professionals.

Those present agreed that the greatest challenges for the region are the declining number of healthcare workers, the cross-border treatment of patient data, and the payment of nursing costs. Due to the peripheral location of the region, **the decrease in the number of healthcare professionals, coupled with an aging workforce** have a particularly strong impact on the border region. Despite the compensation offered (e.g., company housing, sports facilities, and family events), the isolated, peripheral Ipeľ Valley is not attractive to doctors and nurses, which leads to **a decline in the quantity and quality of available healthcare services**. Slovak stakeholders emphasized that although the employment of professionals from outside the EU could alleviate the problem, strict Slovak regulations make this very difficult. In addition to streamlining regulations, supporting telemedicine services and implementing the necessary training programs and technical developments could be a way out of the current situation.

During the presentation of the hospitals, the institution in Veľký Krtíš highlighted the shortage of doctors, the difficulties in employing professionals from third countries, and the resulting long waiting lists. Thanks to the previously implemented **CrossCoop** project, cooperation has already been established between the hospitals in Veľký Krtíš and Balassagyarmat, and in light of this, the Hungarian hospital sees the possibility of extending its catchment area across the border in the fields of stroke, infectious diseases, and emergency rescue. In addition, rehabilitation and oncology treatments are also available in Balassagyarmat, and the maternity ward has recently reopened.

The situation of the hospital in Šahy is complicated by the fact that its catchment area belongs to three different administrative districts, which greatly complicates the care of patients living in the region and the sharing of data. Half of the catchment area falls within Hungary, while a quarter of the Slovak settlements belong to the Nitra region and the remainder to the Banská Bystrica region. The importance of the hospital is confirmed by the **fact that hospitals in the vicinity have already been closed**, so that only Šahy can provide care between Levice and Veľký Krtíš. In terms of

equipment, the hospital has a laboratory, a CT scanner, and the technical equipment necessary for telemedicine, and the building is currently undergoing renovation.

The participants agreed that **they would like to implement their development plans in a coordinated and joint manner**. The HUSK Interreg program's 2025 call for proposals provides an opportunity for this, with direct support for healthcare cooperation.

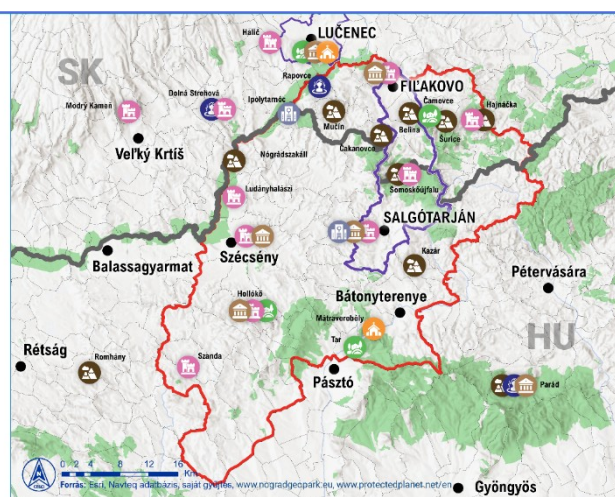
## 2.1.6 Salgótarján – Fil'akovo – Lučenec city network area

### 2.1.6.a First round reference group workshop: Lučenec

**Location:** Lučenec

**Date:** March 5, 2024

**Organizer:** CESCİ Carpathia



### Summary of the workshop's most important findings

The discussion revealed that while relations between **Fil'akovo and Salgótarján** are indeed strong, Lučenec also cooperates with Hungarian settlements in the Ipeľ Valley. Its ties with Salgótarján are primarily cultural and sporting in nature, so the scope for cooperation is more limited in terms of subject matter. From a geographical point of view, it is therefore **worth focusing on the Fil'akovo-Salgótarján city pair in the future.**

**The socio-economic and real estate market situations** on both sides of the border are **very similar**, so relocation is not typical, and the appearance of entrepreneurs on the other side of the border is sporadic. Accordingly, the agglomeration phenomena that presuppose a higher level of integration are absent here. The Slovak side is not interested in this, and the Hungarian side is not strong enough to compensate for this deficiency.

- Many people commute from Slovakia to Hungary for **work and study**. COVID has set back commuting for educational purposes, as parents have experienced what it is like when the borders are closed. This is a positive change for the Hungarian community in Fil'akovo area, as brain drain poses serious challenges for the region in terms of maintaining institutions, employment, and developing the local economy. They also view the phenomenon of many

students from the area graduating from medical universities in Hungary in a similar light, as they do not learn the technical language in Slovak there and therefore do not return. Overall, it can be said that the already disadvantaged district of Lučenec **is not really interested in strengthening cross-border mobility.**

- On the contrary, **shopping tourism** is particularly noteworthy, and Hungarians from Salgótarján and the surrounding area are keen to take advantage of the gastronomic offerings on the Slovak side. Hungarian primary producers have also appeared on the market in Lučenec, but they are not familiar with Slovak hygiene regulations, which is a problem, and their presence cannot be considered legitimate. This situation needs to be addressed. Overall, **Salgótarján is not strong enough to serve as a driver of integration.**

For the actors in the region, the above means that it is **not the division of functions but the joint development of functions** that is the area for joint thinking.

- In this regard, the development of **public transport** is crucial, primarily the restoration of the Lučenec-Salgótarján rail connection. This would require major infrastructure interventions, as the facilities are in very poor physical condition.
- A common challenge is **the revitalization of brownfield sites**, which could also be initiated jointly by the three cities. From this point of view, it may be interesting to revive and thematize common industrial traditions.
- Similarly, **tourism cooperation** is a central theme, for which the geopark is an exceptional coordination tool. This is operated by an association on the Slovak side and a non-profit limited liability company on the Hungarian side, but the nearly 100 local municipalities covered by the geopark are less involved and are currently unable to ensure the joint management of the geopark title. They would like to establish a new EGTC to replace the one that previously went bankrupt, as without it they cannot represent the geopark in European and global networks.
- Due to the morphological characteristics of the area, **disaster** management is a problem. Firefighters on the Slovak side were unable to access the fire that broke out in the castle in Somoskő, as the castle can only be accessed from the Hungarian side. Rescue operations pose a similar difficulty.

The need for **bilingualism** was also raised at this workshop.

It is also clear that the **relevant ministries** must be involved in the second round, but this can be better organized at the sectoral level; it cannot be expected that ministry staff will travel to every rural workshop.

### 2.1.6.b Second round reference group workshop: Ipolytarnóc

**Location:** Ipolytarnóc

**Date:** September 11, 2024

**Organizer:** CESCO Budapest (LP)



### Summary of the most important findings of the workshop

The second round of consultations organized in the region was based on comments related to tourism and issues concerning the **integrated** development of the cross-border **Novohrad-Nógrád Geopark**. The workshop was attended by the municipalities of Salgótarján and Fil'akovo, the Bükki National Park Directorate (BNPI) and the Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture (as the maintainer of the national park), as well as the region's member of parliament.

The Novohrad-Nógrád Geopark was added to **the UNESCO list of geoparks** in 2010. The title is maintained by a Slovak association and a Hungarian non-profit limited liability company. The Novohrad-Nógrád EGTC was established to ensure effective joint management, and since 2011 it has sought to guarantee the protection of geological heritage across borders. However, the EGTC did not have the right to use the UNESCO title and ceased to exist in 2021 due to financial problems. The establishment of a new EGTC was proposed by the BNPI. In the meantime, the professional representation of the geopark was taken over by the BNPI from the non-profit limited liability company, for which the EGTC is the only legal form that allows active participation. UNESCO also supports the reorganization of the EGTC.

The BNPI's greater involvement is justified by the fact that the national park covers the entire Hungarian side of the geopark and, thanks to its grant management department, has already successfully implemented several Interreg projects.

During the consultation, the new organization was named **Neograd Geopark EGTC**, with its administrative center to be established at the BNPI's Baglyaskő center. In order to ensure joint ownership of the UNESCO title, the participants agreed that the Slovak Geoparks Association would also be a founding member of the EGTC and that the non-profit limited liability company would transfer ownership of the title to the city of Salgótarján.

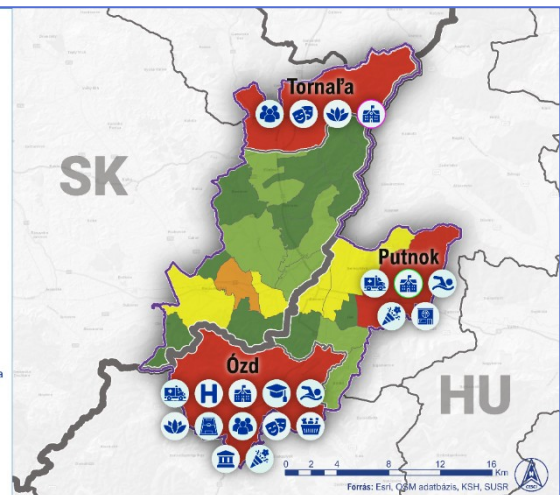
## 2.1.7 Tornaľa – Putnok – Ózd city network area

### 2.1.7.a First round reference group workshop: Putnok

**Location:** Putnok

**Date:** February 5, 2024

**Organizer:** CESC Budapest (LP)



### Summary of the most important findings of the workshop

There is no question about Putnok's commitment to cross-border cooperation; they are happy to take on a leading role, but they lack human resources. Tornaľa tends to follow a free-rider strategy, while we learned nothing about Ózd's willingness to cooperate; they did not respond and did not attend. The mayors of Putnok and Ózd do consult with each other, but there is no friendship between them, and Ózd was the first to leave the EGTC. **External assistance would be needed to bring the city network to life.**

Many people in the region commute from the Slovak side **to work** on the Hungarian side, mainly at Bosch in Miskolc. There is also **student mobility**, mainly due to the recent closure of the Hungarian-language high school in Tornaľa. However, the movement of students means that they do not learn Slovak properly, so they do not return to Slovakia afterwards. One solution to this problem could be the spread of bilingual education in Hungarian schools, which the participants see no obstacle to, especially since a sports talent development center with 120 students is set to open in Putnok in the near future. At the same time, transportation for the students must also be resolved, as commuting across the border would be difficult for many families. In addition,

cooperation could also be established in the field of sports education for students in the Rimavská Sobota region: ski lessons could be launched in Hungarian in Kokava nad Rimavicou, while horse riding lessons could be offered to Slovak students at the Hucul stud farm in Jósvalfő.

Currently, there is a complete lack of **public transport**, and demand would be low, so it is not recommended to restart the Rožňava-Miskolc bus service without prior assessment.

Putnok has exemplary **social services**, which could be adapted in the surrounding area. However, cross-border social care (including care for the elderly, disadvantaged and disabled children, and public employment for disadvantaged people) currently faces legal obstacles.

There is no movement in **healthcare**.

A social store **selling products** from Gemer will open in Putnok in the spring of 2024, but it will only sell products from the Hungarian side on a non-profit basis.

All stakeholders would support the development of **the tourist destination**, for which it would be important to extend the cycle path network built on the Hungarian side to the Slovak side.

There is a significant lack of people to organize cross-border relations, provide information about funding opportunities, and **write and manage project proposals**. At the same time, Gemer EXPO will be held for the 23rd time in 2024, which is not only an economic meeting but also a sporting and cultural event (with a hunting meeting), so the openness and capacity to develop cross-border relations are there.

Recommended next steps:

- expert assistance in launching the professional work of the EGTC, which could be the driving force behind further projects;
- conducting a survey to help launch bilingual education and developing a concept;
- setting up a tourism development working group, which would also assess local values and local products and could form the core of cross-border destination management;
- compiling and promoting a summary of the Putnok social model, examining its adaptability, and analyzing the relevant legal background.

### 2.1.7.b Second round of reference group workshops: Tornaľa

**Location:** Tornaľa

**Date:** February 6, 2025

**Organizer:** CESCO Carpathia (P2)



## Summary of the most important findings of the workshop

Compared to last year's workshop in Putnok, **we did not learn any new information of significance.**

It is clear that one of the main obstacles to development is **the poor financial situation of Slovakian municipalities.** These are generally small towns with weak economic performance, high unemployment rates, and many socially disadvantaged people. They are not creditworthy and cannot pre-finance projects. Their situation has been further exacerbated by recent austerity measures.

In general, everyone considered it important to address **health and social problems**, but no one mentioned any specific ideas.

The statements regarding **Miskolc's role as a center of attraction** were supported, but, for example, no more than one busload of people commute from the Slovak side to the Bosch factory.

The most popular development idea would be to continue **the bicycle path network** already built on the Hungarian side on the Slovak side, but this would also require the assistance of the county government.

The initiative for a tourist and leisure card in Ózd and the experience gained from the Putnok project indicate that **cooperation between the two neighboring towns** could also be a catalyst for the Slovak side, but it is also clear that cross-border cooperation is characterized more by symbolic gestures, and the foundations for joint development are lacking. **External assistance** would be needed to start cooperation.

None of the participants mentioned any **specific legal obstacles**, nor did they make any suggestions as to which institutions should be involved in the expert roundtables.

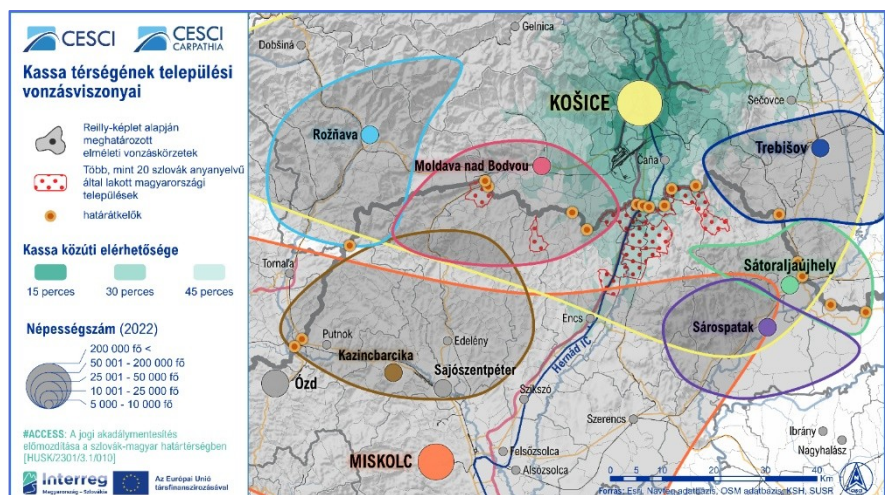
## 2.1.8 Košice urban catchment area

### 2.1.8.a First round of reference group workshops: Košice

**Location:** Košice

**Date:** March 6, 2024

**Organizer:** CESCO Carpathia (P2)





## Summary of the workshop's key findings

Košice's functional position is fundamentally determined by **its relative distance from the Slovak capital**, and even services in Budapest are more easily accessible from there than those in Bratislava. At the same time, the city's catchment area extends far into Hungary, not only for historical reasons, but also because there are no other settlements of similar size and function in the vicinity.

In Košice, on the other hand, closer cooperation with areas beyond the city limits is not common practice. Perhaps partly due to the new Volvo factory and the need to reorganize transportation, **catchment area planning** has recently come to the fore, with 40 local governments in the surrounding area classified as having a commuter rate of more than 20%. However, Hungarian settlements are not taken into account in this case either.

**Residential mobility** is a growing phenomenon that is not limited to Košice and its surroundings; people are moving to the Hungarian side from distant northern Slovak districts, especially since the construction of the Volvo factory began. At the same time, the residents of Košice are gradually discovering the services **available on the Hungarian side**: shopping centers, restaurants, spas, and swimming pools are the main attractions. In contrast, **healthcare facilities** in Košice could also serve patients from Hungary.

One of the main challenges in the region is to improve **public transport** conditions to serve the growing mobility, as more and more people commute from the Hungarian side to the Slovak city, but passenger transport capacities are limited. The existing Košice-Hidasnémeti route is an example of how local and international routes can be combined. However, there is a 3.5-ton weight limit on cross-border roads, so the annex to the intergovernmental agreement on border crossings would need to be amended to allow bus traffic on these roads.

One of the most important messages from the workshop was that it would be worthwhile to revive **the intergovernmental joint committee**, as without it, local needs would not reach decision-makers. The joint committee meetings were discontinued a good 10 years ago.

In addition, it was suggested that, given the increasingly vibrant business relations, it would be necessary to make available and update the legal framework for business start-ups and investments. There is also a need for wider **sharing of information**: when a private individual crosses the border, they are subject to a number of laws, and ignorance of these laws can result in penalties.

### 2.1.8.b Second round of reference group workshops: Hidasnémeti

**Location:** Hidasnémeti

**Date:** November 19, 2024

**Organizer:** CESCO Budapest



#### Summary of the workshop's most important findings

South of Košice, **the Volvo factory** being built in Valaliky will fundamentally change the situation in the border region, as the development induced by the investment **will attract new workers to the border region**, many of whom **will move to settlements on the Hungarian side**, where housing is cheaper. In preparation for these developments, a second workshop was held in Hidasnémeti, to which local mayors, investment specialists, and transportation experts were invited.

According to plans, the new factory will employ 1,500 workers per shift by 2027, who will be required to speak Slovak (and in some cases English). In order to ensure a suitably trained workforce, the plans also include the development of training courses. **The factory does not necessarily take into account the conditions and workers on the Hungarian side of the border**, citing the lack of transparency in Hungarian regulations, and neither does the county's development department. (The plans do not take into account factors and considerations on the Hungarian side). The selection of suppliers is influenced by geographical proximity and quality expectations, thus creating opportunities for the involvement of Hungarian players. The change in the character of the region is confirmed by the fact that, in parallel with the investment, new residential areas are being built in the eastern part of Košice, school capacities are being expanded, new courses are being launched in educational institutions, new roads and bicycle paths are being built to connect factories, public transport connections are being developed, and the number of healthcare institutions is also increasing. However, **the developments only extend to the Slovak side of the border**, and there is no cross-border analysis or planning. One of the most important outcomes of the meeting was the raising of the need for **joint planning**.

In terms of public transport connections, the biggest change is **the new fare system** introduced in eastern Slovakia, which is based on the number of zones traveled rather than the distance traveled. The service between Košice and Hidasnémeti is operated by Košice County, but **it is not possible to exchange transfer tickets or passes** on these buses. It is not possible to launch new cross-border services due to **the 3.5-ton weight limit** in force at small border crossings. The justification for this restriction is questionable given the existing higher capacity of border crossings and growing demand. Another problem is the **cabotage restriction**, which does not allow international vehicles to be used domestically.

Despite the existence of a rail link, it is also not possible to change trains between Miskolc and Košice. Due to the different technical characteristics of the two countries' rail networks, **locomotive changes** at the border are still necessary. At the same time, there are efforts to relocate the railway terminal of one of the lines from Čaňa to Hidasnémeti.

In order to ensure that commuters from the Hungarian side can also reach the industrial facilities in the vicinity of Košice area from the Hungarian side, it is necessary to announce **the launch of new services** (lifting of weight restrictions at border crossings), **the issuance of season tickets**, **the extension of the established tariff system across the border**, and **changes to timetables**. However, the latter is a slow process: changes can take three months for buses and up to a year for trains.

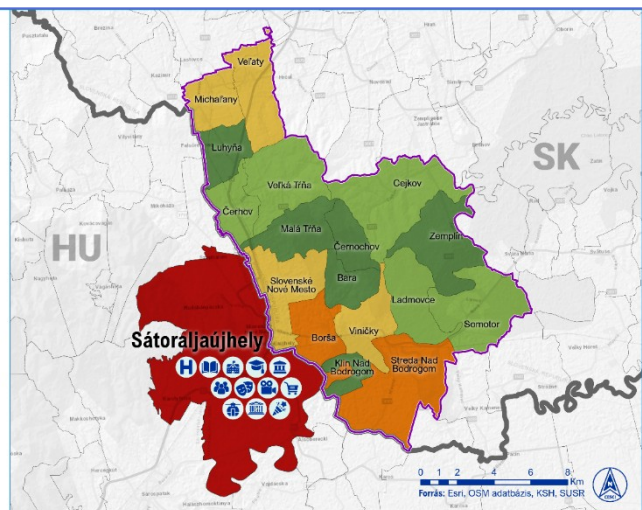
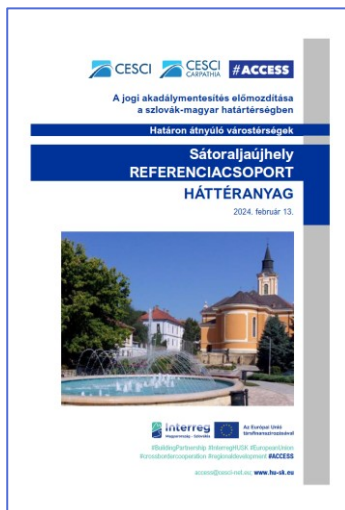
## 2.1.9 Sátoraljaújhely urban catchment area

### 2.1.9.a First round of reference group workshops: Sátoraljaújhely

**Location:** Sátoraljaújhely

**Date:** February 13, 2024

**Organizer:** CESC Budapest



### Summary of the workshop's most important findings

**Sátoraljaújhely acts as a link** between Tokaj-Hegyalja and the Slovak Bodrog region, with Kráľovský Chlmec and Veľké Kapušany, but in some respects it also has an impact on Trebišov.

The immediate suburban area on the other side of the border is intensely felt within a radius of about 10 km / 15 minutes.

Due to the lack of public transport options, commuters now prefer individual modes **of transport**, and the development of public transport is not currently a priority. However, the restoration of the former rail link and the development of the railway line in both directions would be important. The bicycle sharing system created as part of the Interreg project will soon be extended to Borša, but this is primarily for tourism purposes.

Cross-border **labor mobility** is significant, with many Slovak citizens working as skilled workers in the local hospital. A new phenomenon is **migration**: Slovak residents have also appeared on the Hungarian side of the border, some of whom work in Sátorajáújhely, while others commute to Slovakia, and the same is true for children attending school.

The city's advantage is the presence of Slovak-language education, which is worth further strengthening, as more and more people are moving from the Košice region who do not speak Hungarian and could benefit from the Slovak-language education available here. The city is consciously striving **to strengthen bilingualism**, not only at the level of posters and invitations: there are also bilingual events.

**The sports facilities** here are a unique attraction of Sátorajáújhely: people come from across the border to play ice hockey, go swimming, play soccer, and handball.

**Shopping tourism** is also significant here, with Slovak shoppers generating 30-40% of the city's traffic. Hungarian citizens mainly purchase building materials on the Slovakian side.

The city is open to **tourism** integration, but cooperation with neighboring villages is relatively difficult, and it has not even been possible to establish joint destination management with Sárospatak. The establishment of an accounting system is also a problem in cross-border relations. The developed cycle path network would require further investment.

### 2.1.9.b Second round of reference group workshops: Kráľovský Chlmec

**Location:** Kráľovský Chlmec

**Date:** November 20, 2024

**Organizer:** CESCO Carpathia



## Summary of the most important findings of the workshop

Of the mayors invited to the consultation, only those from the immediate vicinity of Kráľovský Chlmec attended, with no participants from Sátoraljaújhely or the nearby Slovak settlements.

Although **Sátoraljaújhely's theoretical catchment area** extends all the way to Veľké Kapušany, this **is not perceived** in Kráľovský Chlmec. The services there are only used to a limited extent (mostly as a last resort). Although **Sátoraljaújhely's economic power** stands out among the surrounding settlements, wages there remain lower than in the industrial parks around Košice. Most commuters therefore prefer to work in Kechnec rather than on the Hungarian side. Although the local workforce is unskilled—and, according to them, difficult to persuade to undergo training—they do have Slovak language skills, which enables them to find employment in industrial parks.

Cross-border **cooperation** between **healthcare institutions** and the coordination of services is a new concept for the locals, as until now they have tended to view the hospital in Sátoraljaújhely as a rival institution that draws doctors and nurses away from the institution in Kráľovský Chlmec, thereby reducing the range of services available locally. The closure of the local hospital would be a major blow to the local community, as after that, the only place within the country that could provide care would be Trebišov, 70 km away. Thanks to the workshop, participants recognized that cross-border coordination of healthcare services (ensuring complementarity) would enable the maintenance of their own hospital, the availability of new services, and the provision of care to patients from Hungary.

The use of **educational institutions** in Sátoraljaújhely is also unusual. Experience shows that students do not return with the knowledge they have acquired there, but put it to use abroad. In their view, local vocational training provision should be coordinated with companies established (or wishing to establish) in the region.

They see little opportunity for cooperation in the field of **tourism**, as the Slovak side has limited offerings and capacity (accommodation, services, etc.). Establishing **public transport connections** is not feasible due to the poor condition of Hungarian roads.

Currently, **they are confident in the establishment of an EGTC**, which will be suitable for amplifying the voice of those living in the border region and improving their living conditions.

## 2.2 Contribution of the reference group workshops to the list of obstacles selected for elimination

During the workshop meetings, the participating mayors and experts were able to present their municipalities and their development needs. Through this, they outlined the **administrative and legal** obstacles that make it difficult to strengthen their cross-border relations. In some cases, it was not clear to the participants what these obstacles were, as they had not yet identified the existing and potential challenges and/or explored the potential of cross-border cooperation, apart from their development needs. As a result, the list of obstacles varies in intensity from one urban area to another.

This chapter discusses the obstacles identified in the reference group workshops by topic area.

*Table 1: Main obstacles identified in the reference group workshops by topic*

Topic	Identified barriers
Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of public transport connections</li> <li>• Financial sustainability</li> <li>• Weight restrictions at the border</li> <li>• Different toll systems</li> <li>• Problems caused by cabotage</li> <li>• Need for cycle paths and bridges</li> </ul>
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintaining parallel hospital capacities</li> <li>• Lack of specialized services</li> <li>• Lack of coordination in cross-border rescue operations</li> <li>• Difficulties in settling accounts between insurance companies</li> <li>• Issuing e-prescriptions, sharing patient data</li> <li>• Technical and legal barriers limiting the spread of telemedicine</li> </ul>
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different school systems</li> <li>• Lack of bilingual institutions and training</li> <li>• Need for vocational schools tailored to the local economy</li> <li>• School choice of Slovak families who have moved</li> </ul>
Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Barriers to joint discount systems (different currencies and accounting systems)</li> <li>• Lack of human capacity in project proposal writing</li> <li>• Lack of a joint tourism council</li> <li>• Differences in monument protection regulations</li> </ul>
Regional planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of harmonization of urban planning and development documents</li> <li>• Administrative barriers (different languages, public procurement procedures, legal/regulatory frameworks)</li> <li>• Lack of joint governance structures</li> <li>• Neighboring municipalities without the right to comment</li> </ul>
Disaster management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulties in crossing borders with special vehicles</li> <li>• Slow response due to administration</li> <li>• Growing demand for joint police stations and patrols</li> </ul>
Waste management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different levels of authority</li> <li>• Prohibition on waste transport</li> <li>• Increased waste volume caused by new residents</li> <li>• Complexity of establishing a joint biogas plant</li> </ul>
Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficult transition between labor and insurance systems</li> <li>• Barriers to the recognition of qualifications</li> <li>• Lack of information about starting a business</li> </ul>

Topic	Identified barriers
Information sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language barriers (technical language, administration)</li> <li>• Lack of multilingual forms and glossaries</li> </ul>
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of registration for new residents</li> <li>• Problem of abandoned vehicles and unkempt plots</li> </ul>
Local products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complexity of selling regional products across borders</li> </ul>
Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management of cross-border protected areas</li> <li>• Management of obstacles in cross-border suburban areas</li> <li>• Revival of the Hungarian-Slovak Joint Committee</li> </ul>
Social welfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficult to adopt local best practices</li> <li>• Segregated communities, care for the elderly, support for people with disabilities</li> </ul>
Energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legal background for coordinating energy supply still unknown</li> <li>• Creation of sustainable energy communities</li> </ul>

## 2.2.1 Transport

In the area of cross-border **transport links**, all urban areas identified obstacles or significant development needs that are difficult to implement. The majority of participants agreed that without public transport links, it is difficult or impossible for the population to use services across the border. Due to the lack of public transport, individual modes of transport and buses hired by employers have come to the fore. In the case of Győr, Tornaľa and Sátoraljaújhely, the establishment of public transport connections is no longer recommended without a **preliminary needs assessment**.

In Bratislava, after a long wait, a private entrepreneur restarted the successor to the 801 bus service between Rajka and the Slovak capital. However, the operator does not receive **any additional support** to maintain this service, which has resulted in **the discontinuation of discounted tickets**. Bus transport is provided between Košice and the Hungarian side, but **weight restrictions at border crossings** limit the number of possible cross-border services. As a result, existing services can only serve part of the agglomeration, and it is currently not possible **to purchase transfer tickets and passes**. Transport in eastern Slovakia was reorganized and zoned in 2024. With the extension of the new fare system to the Hungarian side, cross-border suburban transport lines can also be launched. Another problem that has emerged is **cabotage**, which makes it difficult for buses to provide both domestic and international passenger transport at the same time. This will require an agreement between the operators on both sides.

As **the financial sustainability** of public transport is always questionable, the development of bus connections or a cycle path network has also been discussed instead of rail connections, which require major infrastructure investment, e.g. Šahy and the neighboring villages of Nógrád, as well as Lučenec and Salgótarján. However, following the example of Komárno, it should be noted that the **maintenance of a community bicycle system** can pose serious challenges after its development.

**The construction of new bridges and expressways** was raised as a need in the case of the twin cities and Győr. A special plan is the new (planned east) Komárno bridge, which is among the needs of the Slovak side.

## 2.2.2 Healthcare

Coordinated healthcare and the challenges associated with it were discussed in detail at a total of 16 meetings. In general, maintaining hospitals, ensuring sufficient numbers of doctors and staff, and guaranteeing quality care are causing difficulties. During the consultations, it emerged that the root of the problem lies partly in **the fact that hospitals operate in close proximity to each other, parallel to each other along the border**, which poses a challenge in terms of ensuring capacity and economies of scale. Maintaining the same services on both sides of the border is not only costly, but also prevents the emergence of new, specific services in the region due to limited resources. Harmonizing services will not only **put the maintenance of healthcare institutions on a more secure footing**, but **also make higher-quality services available** in the region through specialization. In the case of Sátoraljaújhely, Kráľovský Chlmec or Šahy, the downsizing of hospitals can be prevented by this approach, with integration focusing on complementary characteristics. The twin city region of Komárno is an encouraging example, where Komárno could provide competitive services to the population of the twin cities in the fields of oncology, emergency care, and obstetrics, while Komárom could do so in the fields of rehabilitation and medicine.

In the case of Esztergom, the contract concluded with the Dôvera insurance company already allows for cross-border patient care, but the circle of eligible persons is limited. **Cross-border rescue intervention** In the case of Rajka, the most tangible problem is that patients who do not speak Hungarian are often transported individually to the border, where they are forced to wait for the arrival of an ambulance from Bratislava.

In addition to **payments between health insurers** (cost reimbursement) , **the redemption of e-prescriptions and the sharing of patients' personal data** stored in the cloud also raise concerns. The spread of **telemedicine** and remote diagnostic technology offers great opportunities, enabling specialist medical care to be provided even in small villages and peripheral areas. However, this requires training, mutual acceptance of the technology, and the establishment of a network. The unfavorable age structure of healthcare workers in the Balassagyarmat-Šahy urban network area is a cardinal problem that could be alleviated by employing doctors and nurses from countries outside the EU. However, this currently faces serious administrative obstacles.

## 2.2.3 Education

The educational institution chosen by families often has a decisive influence on whether young people return to their homeland. As a result, many communities are reluctant to allow their children to study in neighboring countries, as they see this as a weakening of their local community. Other factors also make interoperability difficult: while the primary school system in Hungary consists of eight grades, in Slovakia it consists of nine grades. As a result, Slovak students studying in Hungary find it difficult to return to the Slovak school system.

On the Hungarian side, the need to establish **bilingual educational institutions and training programs** has arisen in several border regions, with relatively different motivations. While in the Salgótarján-Fil'akovo-Lučenec city network area, they see this as increasing the chances of students returning home, in the case of Esztergom and Štúrovo, they hope to improve the qualifications of those working in hospitality. In Putnok, the closure of the Hungarian-language secondary school in Tornaľa would be offset by the establishment of a bilingual institution.

**The coordination of vocational school training programs** and their alignment with the profile of the local economy would also help people stay in the region.

Another problem is the enrollment of Slovak citizens who have moved to Hungary in local schools. The problem is particularly relevant in the cross-border agglomeration of Bratislava and Košice, where it is important to ensure sufficient student numbers in order to maintain municipal schools. Newcomers mostly only use kindergarten services locally and **do not require primary school education**. Changing this attitude would require high-quality, multilingual training opportunities.

#### 2.2.4 Tourism

In order to promote tourist attractions, cross-border management and discounts are being developed to attract as many visitors as possible to the border region. The introduction of a tourist card or joint spa pass is difficult due to **different accounting systems and currencies**. This issue was raised mainly at the meetings in Komárno, Esztergom, and Sátoraljaújhely, but these problems also partially hindered cooperation at the meeting in Tornaľa. In the latter case, the lack of human resources for writing and managing cross-border tourism related projects also hinders the development of tourism relations. At the twin city workshops, the idea of creating a kind of joint tourism council was also raised, in which local EGTCs would play a prominent role. In the case of Komárno, the submission of a joint EAF application is one of the long-term goals, which would involve the renovation of the cross-border fortification system. However, the (different) monument protection regulations in force in the two countries may hinder the restoration of these buildings according to uniform principles.

#### 2.2.5 Regional planning

In order for settlements in urban areas to develop according to the same goals and principles, and to be aware of each other's development intentions, it is necessary **to coordinate urban planning and development documents**. This will enable a harmonized approach to addressing the challenges observed on both sides of the border region and avoid the coexistence of conflicting functions and land use (which may follow completely different development logics). Administrative barriers in this area include **public procurement, different regulatory frameworks** (e.g., monument protection), and **language differences**. Another important factor is the lack of coordinated cooperation (joint governance structures) between institutions with decision-making power in the planning process.

In the case of the Salgótarján – Fil'akovo – Lučenec city network area and the twin cities of Komárno-Komárom, the revitalization of brownfield sites is the primary consideration. In the case of Komárom and Komárno, compatible plans could include road and port development, reconstruction of the fortification system, development of industrial facilities, and recultivation of the Danube riverbank. The most effective approach would be to establish a permanent joint planning process, as proposed by the municipalities of Esztergom and Štúrovo.

However, the most urgent steps are needed in relation to Bratislava and Košice. The growth of the Slovak capital is greatly limited by national borders, and new residential areas are already being designated in directly adjacent to the border. The settlements on the other side of the border **are not informed about** these processes, **and they have no right to comment on or influence** the developments. The intensive industrial development in the Košice region also ignores the cross-border aspect. The reason for this is that it is not mandatory to include these aspects in the analyses preparing investments in the border region.

## 2.2.6 Disaster management

In the event of a disaster or rescue operation, it is vital that the rescue team can reach the scene quickly. In certain cases, help could arrive most quickly from across the border, but **the crossing of special vehicles (e.g., fire trucks) at the border is currently difficult** due to complicated preliminary administration, which hinders rapid response. This obstacle has been identified in three urban areas, namely Győr, Esztergom, and Lučenec. In addition, increasing public safety, increasing the frequency of joint patrols, and strengthening the joint police station are also among the requirements in Rajka.

Overall, in order to ensure effective action and the personal and property safety of those living in the border region, it is necessary to coordinate rescue and disaster management operations.

## 2.2.7 Waste management

Moving across the country's border and commuting across the border also creates challenges in areas such as municipal waste management. In many cases, people who move from Ipolyság (Šahy) still pay waste collection fees at their old place of residence, while the waste itself is generated on the other side of the border. To address this problem, the city is initiating **the creation of a waste association**, but the legal possibilities for involving Hungarian municipalities are not yet clear. The obstacle is compounded by the fact that **waste collection**, as a public service, **has been nationalized in Hungary, while in Slovakia it remains the responsibility of local municipalities**. The increased amount of waste also poses difficulties for the municipal administration of Rajka, as the previous capacities are no longer sufficient to serve the growing population. However, the municipal budget **cannot count on the taxes paid by commuters** to Bratislava. No solution has yet been found to correct this situation.

The municipal authorities of Komárom and Komárno see potential in joint waste management. The Hungarian side could also benefit from the experience gained on the Slovak side (in the field of kitchen waste management). However, joint waste management is hampered not only by differing levels of authority, but also by **the ban on transporting waste across the border**. Once this obstacle has been overcome, it would be possible to establish a joint biogas plant that could supply energy to both sides of the Danube.

## 2.2.8 Employment

Working in another country is always a complicated process, especially if it does not involve a change of residence. The complexity of **the transition between labor and insurance systems** (e.g., submitting an A1 form) can easily discourage people living in the border region from working in a neighboring country. **The recognition of qualifications** (e.g. for professional psychologists or speech therapists) is complicated even when the working language is the same as the language of instruction at the institution that awarded the qualification. Another obstacle is **the lack of information on starting a business and investing**, which hinders the economic recovery of the border region.

## 2.2.9 Information sharing

**Understanding the administrative language** used in government offices is often difficult even for native speakers. Not to mention residents who have moved across the border without knowledge of

the official language. Communication between the population and the authorities could be facilitated by information brochures, informative websites, online dictionaries, and multilingual forms. A particular problem is the harmonization of technical terms, which could be solved by publishing specialized pocket dictionaries on various topics.

### 2.2.10 Housing

The primary challenge for local authorities in relation to new arrivals is the lack of registration. Some of the new arrivals **do not register officially when they settle**, making it difficult to determine the actual number of people living in the municipality. Under these circumstances, it is particularly **difficult to reach property owners**, which is especially important when the untidy state of the land detracts from the image of the municipality. Similar tensions are generated by abandoned and illegally parked vehicles (often without license plates or technical inspection), whose owners are also difficult to locate.

### 2.2.11 Local products

Several types of **local products** are already available in the Slovak-Hungarian border region, but **selling them across the border is extremely complicated**. In order for the local product system to function effectively and for the cross-border use of regional trademarks not to cause problems, a legal solution should be found for the sale of products in neighboring countries. The problem was discussed at the workshops in Esztergom, Lučenec, and Putnok.

### 2.2.12 Governance

The topic of governance first arose in connection with a rather special case, namely the management of the Novohrad-Nógrád Geopark. In order to protect cross-border geological values and retain the UNESCO title, it is necessary **to select an organizational form with the appropriate level of authority**. The most effective solution to this problem is to establish an EGTC, which, as a legal entity, can operate in both countries.

**The expansion of the Slovak capital** also affects the Austrian and Hungarian sides, where a total of more than 13,000 Slovak citizens now live, in some cases constituting the majority of the local population. This phenomenon generates complex challenges similar to those in similar suburban areas within countries, which in this case can be addressed by a cross-border governance solution, taking into account the legal frameworks of the three countries.

The meeting in Košice also raised the issue of **reviving the Hungarian-Slovak Intergovernmental Joint Committee**, which could provide a forum for discussing the relevant legal and administrative obstacles.

### 2.2.13 Social welfare

In certain municipalities (e.g., Putnok), exemplary services and networks have been established in the field of **social welfare**. The knowledge accumulated locally **could be extended** to other municipalities in the urban area, but this is currently hampered by legal obstacles. Removing these obstacles would improve the education and care of disadvantaged and disabled students living in

the border region, improve the living conditions of people living in segregated areas, and provide better care for the elderly.

### **2.2.14 Energy**

Due to geographical proximity and the pursuit of sustainability, increasing emphasis is being placed on the establishment of energy communities. In the Slovak-Hungarian context, cross-border energy systems are a new concept, so **the legal background for coordinating energy supply is still unknown**. In order for such communities to be established in the border region, it is necessary to explore this uncertainty.

## 2.3 Processes generated by reference group workshops

In several cases, the reference group workshops initiated processes aimed at removing individual obstacles.

### 2.3.1 Removing public transport barriers in the Košice region

The Volvo factory will start operating in 2026 in Valaliky, located between Košice and the Hungarian border, which will fundamentally change the employment and commuting conditions in the region. The factory and its suppliers could employ up to 10,000 people in the future, which will bring about revolutionary changes given the economic and social conditions in the eastern regions of the two countries. It is expected that the new factory's demand for labor will lead to cross-border commuting from the outset, as more than a thousand Slovak citizens already live in Hungarian settlements, where employment indicators are unfavorable and the number of jobs is low.

On October 8, 2019, the districts of Košice and Prešov established a limited liability company called IDS Východ (Integrated Transport System East), which operates the public transport system of the same name. Following a needs assessment and planning phase, the new regional fare system will be operational in the two eastern Slovak counties from August 1, 2024. Under the new model, fares are calculated not on the basis of distance, but on the number of zone boundaries crossed during the journey. The system was first introduced on suburban bus services and then extended to rail and local public transport services. Although the system's slogan is "doprava bez hraníc" (i.e., "transport without borders"), the fare system does not apply to cross-border services connecting Tornynosnémeti (802 818) and Hidasnémeti (802 418, 8020 419) into the metropolitan network. Today, it is still only possible to travel on these lines with a ticket; it is not possible to purchase a pass.

Following an invitation from CESCO Carpathia, IDS representatives attended workshops in Košice and Hidasnémeti, where they presented the new system. The partners of the #ACCESS project then began to examine the possibility of extending the tariff system. CESCO Carpathia commissioned a legal analysis of the VAT costs of cross-border transport services under its agreement with the Faculty of Law of Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice. CESCO Carpathia discussed the results of the study with representatives of IDS Východ in February 2025 and also informed CESCO about it. On this basis, CESCO staff compiled a collection of examples of well-functioning European cross-border tariff systems and raised the possibility of establishing a cross-border organization (EGTC). The Slovak legal expert did not find the information in the summaries of good practices detailed enough to determine their applicability, and did not consider the EGTC format adaptable to the specific problem. CESCO then contacted the organization operating the Léman Pass in the Geneva metropolitan area. At the time of writing, arrangements were being made to conduct an interview with them.

CESCO Carpathia wrote to the Slovak Ministry of Transport to discuss the regulatory options at a professional level. This meeting will take place in early September 2025. After that, Hungarian and Slovak service providers and decision-makers will be able to sit down together to find a solution to the obstacle. According to preliminary discussions, Hungarian service providers are open to launching the services.

The exemption process is therefore not yet complete, but without the reference group workshop, the issue would probably not have been brought to the attention of the national authorities.

### 2.3.2 Cross-border governance solution in the Novohrad-Nógrád Geopark region

Covering 64 Hungarian and 28 Slovak settlements, the Novohrad-Nógrád Geopark was the world's first cross-border geopark to receive UNESCO certification in 2010 and become a member of the European and Global Geoparks Networks. The title was awarded to the geopark as a whole, but the stewardship tasks had to be divided into two parts: in Slovakia, an association registered as an association of legal entities (Združenie právnických osôb Geopark Novohrad-Nógrád), and in Hungary, a company (Novohrad-Nógrád Geopark Nonprofit Kft.) performs this task.

An attempt was made to establish an EGTC for the joint management of the geopark, but according to the interpretation of the competent ministry at the time, the Novohrad-Nógrád European Territorial Association, founded in 2011 by the municipalities of Salgótarján and Fil'akovo, could not limit its activities to the operation of the geopark. The EGTC itself, which was not the geopark's organization, ceased its activities in 2016 and was deleted from the EGTC register in 2021.

The creation of the new association was initiated in 2024 by the Bükki National Park Directorate (BNPI), which manages the natural heritage of the geopark. The EGTC format was seen as an adequate solution because it is the only legal entity in which they can participate as a state body. For Salgótarján, regional tourism development and global visibility were important, while for Fil'akovo, the financial challenges of operating the geopark were important reasons for a joint organization to take over the management of the geopark title and the task of integrated development of the region. Accordingly, the second regional reference group workshop on September 11, 2024, was dedicated to the establishment of the EGTC at the geopark visitor center in Ipolytarnóc. Prior to the meeting, CESCO staff prepared the formal version of the EGTC's founding documents, the agreement and the statutes, which did not yet include organizational and decision-making sections. These were discussed in the first round at the September meeting, and interested parties were able to submit further proposals in writing to the conclusions reached there. In November 2024, based on these, the draft statutes and agreement were completed, which the founding members were again able to comment on.

The main challenge that had to be addressed was the joint management of the UNESCO title, which was solved by the Karawanken Geopark (modeled on the former geopark EGTC) and the Muskauer Faltenbogen Geopark with the help of an EGTC. In order to apply this, the Slovak association had to join the EGTC as a founding member, and Salgótarján had to take over the title rights from the non-profit limited liability company. The problem was that the Slovak association did not have exclusively public law members, who therefore had to be removed from the organization so that the association itself could join the EGTC; and that the non-profit limited liability company had members other than the Municipality of Salgótarján, namely Ipoly Erdő Zrt, an association, and several private entrepreneurs, who had to approve the transfer of the title. Both processes took several months.

Meanwhile, on March 31, 2025, a meeting was held between the BNPI and the municipality of Salgótarján, and based on the opinions of the founding members, a new version of the two founding documents was completed in May 2025. In order to discuss the remaining open issues, another meeting was held at the Salgótarján mayor's office on May 30, 2025. Based on what was said there, CESCO staff drafted the final documents, which were approved by the founding members at their meetings in June 2025. In July, the founding process began on the Slovak side, with CESCO continuing to provide professional assistance (by answering questions from the approving authority through ). We also supported the Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture in preparing and obtaining approval for the national park.

At the time of writing, both approval procedures were ongoing. Once these have been completed, the Hungarian approval and registration process can begin, followed by the EU publication procedure. The process, which was launched by the reference group workshop in spring 2024, could be completed by spring 2026.

The EGTC to be established will not only be one of the indicators (solutions) of the #ACCESS project, but also a development organization for the less developed border regions of the two countries, which could play a significant role in stimulating the cross-border economy in the future, while also ensuring the global visibility of the region.

### **2.3.3 Cross-border governance solution in the Bratislava metropolitan region**

At the Bratislava and Rajka reference group workshops, a highly complex set of interrelated challenges, difficulties, and obstacles was identified in relation to cross-border suburbanization and residential mobility, which cannot be solved individually. It was clear that a governance solution would be needed to systematically remove existing obstacles in the coming years and ensure the sustainable and polycentric development of the cross-border agglomeration.

From the point of view of moving forward, it was ideal that, with the support of the European Commission, the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) and the French Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (MOT) had just published their call for cross-border planning tasks (12 days before the second workshop in Rajka), with a submission deadline of November 30, 2024. CESCO staff brought the call for proposals to the attention of the Bratislava team, who submitted a successful application. The project was implemented from February to the end of September 2025, and its main goal was to identify cross-border development tasks for the Bratislava metropolitan area and to propose a joint Slovak-Austrian-Hungarian governance structure.

Although the first Bratislava migrants appeared in Rajka in the early 2000s, it was the Slovaks who were the first to start developing governance frameworks with the Austrian border region. With the help of three Slovak-Austrian Interreg projects called BAUM (Bratislava Umland Management), a development concept was drawn up between 2011 and 2022, a joint office was established, where three people currently work, and the foundations were laid for the creation of a joint organization in the form of a working community (Arbeitsgemeinschaft / pracovné spoločenstvo) (without legal personality).

As part of the Resilient Borders project, the baum\_cityregion office contracted CESCO as an external expert, which coordinated the organization and implementation of four professional workshops and, on the other hand, developed an action plan by the end of August 2025, which includes the future thematic development tasks of the trilateral cooperation and a proposal for the governance framework. The professional workshops provided the first opportunity for Hungarian and Austrian mayors from the cross-border metropolitan area to meet. They found the workshop so useful that they organized another one in Kittsee on their own initiative, at the invitation of the mayor there. Dunakiliti undertook to host the next meeting. A permanent consultation platform was thus established.

In order to further strengthen the integration processes, CESCO experts also informed the municipality of Bratislava about further funding opportunities.

Thanks to the #ACCESS project, exemplary and lively cooperation is taking shape in the cross-border metropolitan area of Bratislava.

### 2.3.4 Healthcare cooperation across borders

Healthcare was a recurring theme in the reference group workshops. Immediately prior to the launch of #ACCESS, in the spring of 2023, CESCOI, together with the National Hospital Directorate (OKFŐ), initiated the establishment of a working group on cross-border healthcare cooperation with the participation of the Ministry of the Interior and its background institutions. After lengthy consultations, the working group held its inaugural meeting on April 24, 2024, with the participation of representatives from the relevant departments of the ministry, OKFŐ, the National Health Insurance Fund (NEAK), the National Ambulance Service (OMSZ), and CESCOI.

The working group systematically addresses issues related to cross-border healthcare services along all of Hungary's borders. Partly in response to the recommendations of the reference group workshops, it also put on its agenda the issue of a Hungarian-Slovak cross-border rescue agreement, which it proposed to draw up on the model of the Austrian-Hungarian and Austrian-Slovak agreements. In this spirit, the first professional workshop was held on November 18, 2024, in Bratislava, followed by a discussion of the content of the agreement on January 22 in Banská Bystrica, jointly organized by experts, CESCOI, and CESCOI Carpathia. The wording of the bilateral agreement is now being finalized at the highest ministerial level and, at the time of writing, is nearing completion. It could be signed as early as 2025 and ratified by parliament in early 2026. This will be followed by the adoption of cooperation agreements governing technical and professional details, the content of which was also discussed by the parties at the two meetings mentioned above.

At the same time, the issue of cross-border outpatient and inpatient care was also discussed, which was also raised at several reference group workshops. The 2025 call for proposals for the Hungarian-Slovak Interreg program provides an opportunity to support such initiatives. Csilla Veres, head of the program's Joint Secretariat, was also present at the reference group workshop in Šahy, where she briefly supplemented Rudolf Bauer's (CESCOI Carpathia) summary of the expected call for proposals. The representatives of the three hospitals present agreed that they would apply.

With the assistance of CESCOI, the first two meetings between the hospitals in Komárno and Esztergom took place on June 23 (in Esztergom) and July 15 (in Komárno), where the parties agreed to submit a joint application. The aim of the project is to compensate for the shortcomings in the neighboring border region in a geographically complementary manner (there is only a rehabilitation hospital in Komárom, and only an outpatient clinic with limited capacity in Štúrovo). The hospital in Komárno would accept Hungarian patients on a pilot basis, while the hospital in Esztergom would accept Slovak patients who do not have insurance with Dôvera. The project would test patient pathways, data management, multilingual communication, prescription writing, and follow-up care, and based on this, a proposal would be made to the two health authorities to develop a cross-border patient care system. Similar projects are also taking shape in other regions with complementary services, which will make it possible to develop an integrated system covering the entire border region in the next decade.

## 3 Appendix

### 3.1 Further information on the first round of reference group workshops

Location		Responsible partner	Date	Link to the news item about the meeting on the project website, where the prepared background materials and the report on the meeting are available
1	Bratislava	P2	March 12, 2024	<a href="https://hu-sk.eu/en/reference-group-in-bratislava-closed-workshop/">https://hu-sk.eu/en/reference-group-in-bratislava-closed-workshop/</a>
2	Győr	LP	January 25, 2024	<a href="https://hu-sk.eu/en/gyor-reference-group-closed-workshop/">https://hu-sk.eu/en/gyor-reference-group-closed-workshop/</a>
3	Komárno	P2	February 28, 2024	<a href="https://hu-sk.eu/en/reference-group-in-komarno-closed-workshop/">https://hu-sk.eu/en/reference-group-in-komarno-closed-workshop/</a>
4	Esztergom	LP	February 2, 2024	<a href="https://hu-sk.eu/en/reference-group-in-esztergom-closed-workshop/">https://hu-sk.eu/en/reference-group-in-esztergom-closed-workshop/</a>
5	Balassagyarmat	LP	February 6, 2024	<a href="https://hu-sk.eu/en/reference-group-in-balassagyarmat-closed-workshop/">https://hu-sk.eu/en/reference-group-in-balassagyarmat-closed-workshop/</a>
6	Lučenec	P2	March 5, 2024	<a href="https://hu-sk.eu/en/reference-group-in-lucenec-closed-workshop/">https://hu-sk.eu/en/reference-group-in-lucenec-closed-workshop/</a>
7	Putnok	LP	February 5, 2024	<a href="https://hu-sk.eu/en/reference-group-in-putnok-closed-workshop/">https://hu-sk.eu/en/reference-group-in-putnok-closed-workshop/</a>
8	Košice	P2	March 6, 2024	<a href="https://hu-sk.eu/en/reference-group-in-kosice-closed-workshop/">https://hu-sk.eu/en/reference-group-in-kosice-closed-workshop/</a>
9	Sátoraljajhely	LP	February 13, 2024	<a href="https://hu-sk.eu/en/reference-group-in-satoraljajhely-closed-workshop/">https://hu-sk.eu/en/reference-group-in-satoraljajhely-closed-workshop/</a>

### 3.2 Further information on the second round of reference group workshops

Location		Responsible partner	Date	Link to the news item about the meeting on the project website, where the prepared background materials and the report on the meeting are available
1	Rajka	LP	October 16, 2024	<a href="https://hu-sk.eu/en/reference-group-rajka/">https://hu-sk.eu/en/reference-group-rajka/</a>
2	Dunajská Streda	P2	March 4, 2025	<a href="https://hu-sk.eu/en/rg-dunajska-streda-en/">https://hu-sk.eu/en/rg-dunajska-streda-en/</a>
3	Komárom	P2 > LP	May 15, 2025	<a href="https://hu-sk.eu/en/rg-komarno-2025-05-15-en/">https://hu-sk.eu/en/rg-komarno-2025-05-15-en/</a>
4	Štúrovo	P2	February 27, 2025	<a href="https://hu-sk.eu/en/rg-sturovo/">https://hu-sk.eu/en/rg-sturovo/</a>
5	Šahy	LP	April 29, 2025	<a href="https://hu-sk.eu/en/rg-sahy-2025-april/">https://hu-sk.eu/en/rg-sahy-2025-april/</a>
6	Ipolytarnóc	LP	September 11, 2024	<a href="https://hu-sk.eu/en/a-new-egtc/">https://hu-sk.eu/en/a-new-egtc/</a>
7	Tornaľa	P2	February 6, 2025	<a href="https://hu-sk.eu/en/workshop-in-tornala/">https://hu-sk.eu/en/workshop-in-tornala/</a>
8	Hidasnémeti	LP > P2	November 19, 2024	<a href="https://hu-sk.eu/en/reference-group-meeting-in-hidasnemeti/">https://hu-sk.eu/en/reference-group-meeting-in-hidasnemeti/</a>
9	Kráľovský Chlmec	P2	November 20, 2024	<a href="https://hu-sk.eu/en/rg-20-november-2024/">https://hu-sk.eu/en/rg-20-november-2024/</a>