

# **Contribution paper of CESCO to the public consultation on cross-border obstacles**

## **1. Harmonisation of databases**

**CESCI**  
2015

Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives (CESCI) was established in 2009. Since the establishment of the association, the planning staff has elaborated several cross-border integrated strategic plans, as well as, the regional analysis of the Danube Transnational Programme and that of Slovakia-Hungary INTERREG V-A programme. During these works we always faced the problem of the incompatibility of data on different countries. Regarding the significance of the problem and following the Nancy initiative of the Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière, on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2014, CESCI organised an international conference on cross-border territorial observation the conference volume of which is under edition, at the moment<sup>1</sup>. On-line publication of the contributions is expected to be made available before the end of the year.

In this document, we give a short illustrated summary on the problems resulted from the lack of harmony of data which makes very problematic the creation of indicators measuring the results of territorial programmes. For this purpose we added maps as examples from the Danube River Basin and cross-border integrated strategic plans worked out by our planning team.

The problems are classified in line with the types of disharmony experienced in elaborating strategic documents.

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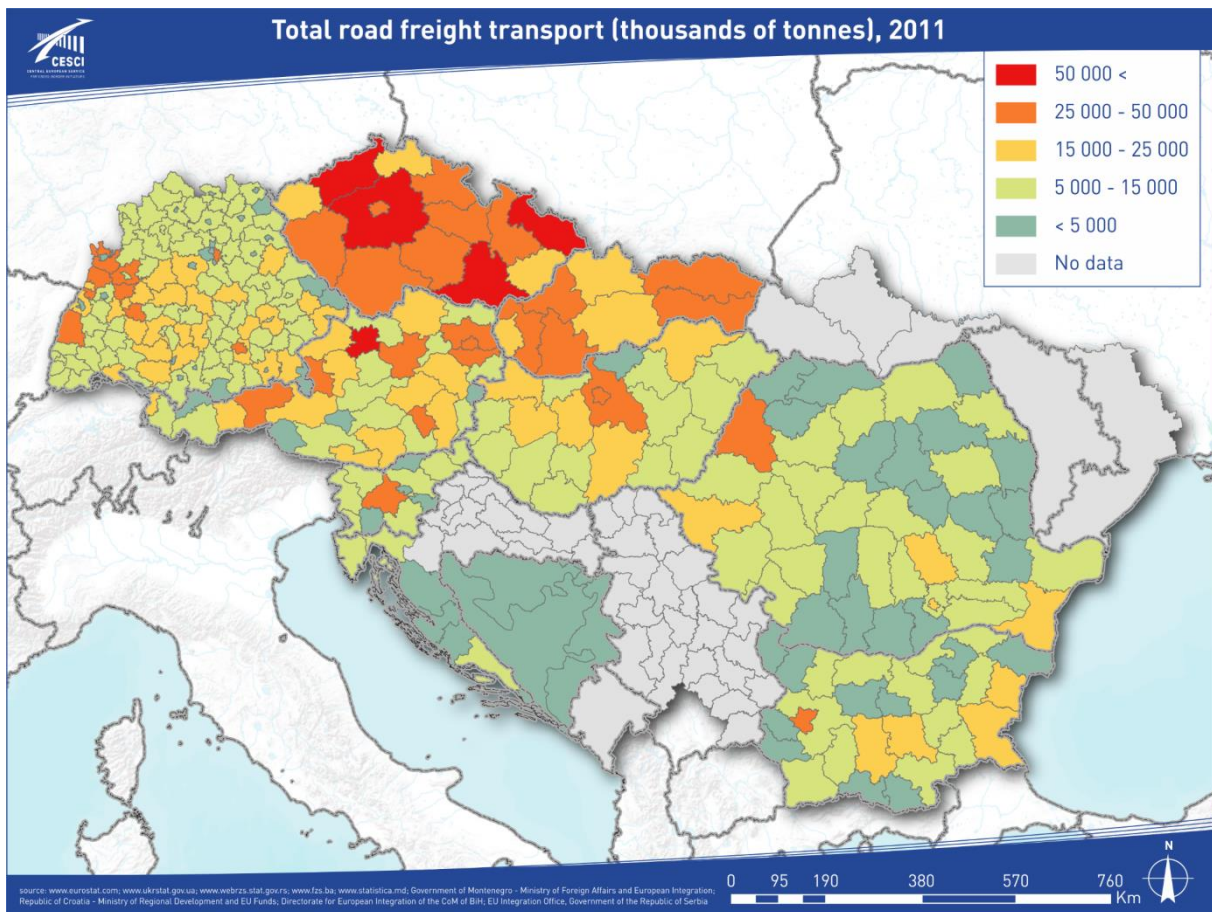
<sup>1</sup> For further details please visit the following website: [http://www.cesci-net.eu/201410\\_ksh\\_conference](http://www.cesci-net.eu/201410_ksh_conference)

## Lack of comparable data (at local level)

Eurostat gathers data from NUTS I to III level, a series of important data are not available at the lowest levels. Cross-border cooperation happens at local level, where the intensity of cooperation is the highest and the most frequent. However, the most often, data are to be gathered from the ground because those describing the real cohesion of the borderland are not available neither at EU nor state level.

The situation is worse in case of macro-regional strategies where also third countries participate in the cooperation. The statistical offices of these countries apply different methods in gathering and processing data compared to those operating in harmony with EU provisions.

Some countries do not collect certain types of data (e.g. the number of nights). In other cases, the data are collected from different administrative levels. On the Figure 1 we are the witnesses of this problem together with another one: the lack of harmonisation of the used methodology.



1. Figure: Total road freight transport in 2011 (differences in the administrative level, the data are collected on and the methods how the data are identified)

In the following table, we gathered some essential examples for incompatible and lacking data from the Danubian area.

1. table: Incompatible and lacking data (source: Eurostat, National Statistical Offices)

		Austria	BiH	Bulgaria	Czech Republic	Croatia	Hungary	Moldova	Montenegro	Germany (relevant provinces)	Romania	Serbia	Slovakia	Slovenia	Ukraine (relevant 4 oblast)
Structural business statistics (number of enterprises by size and sectors)		+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	+
	Lowest achievable territorial level	NUTS0	Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina; Republika Srpska; Brčko District	NUTS0	NUTS0	NUTS0	LAU2	NUTS0	NUTS3	NUTS3	LAU2	-	LAU2	LAU2	Raion+D1:E16
R&D		+	-	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	-
	Lowest achievable territorial level	NUTS2	-	NUTS2	NUTS2	NUTS2	NUTS3	-	NUTS0	NUTS2	NUTS2	NUTS0	NUTS3	NUTS2	-
Agricultural statistics (number of holdings by size of cultivated land)		+	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-
	Lowest achievable territorial level	NUTS2	-	NUTS2	NUTS2	NUTS2	NUTS3	NUTS0	NUTS0	NUTS2	NUTS2	NUTS0	NUTS2	NUTS2	-

		Austria	BIH	Bulgaria	Czech Republic	Croatia	Hungary	Moldova	Montenegro	Germany (relevant provinces)	Romania	Serbia	Slovakia	Slovenia	Ukraine (relevant 4 oblast)
Number of foreign and domestic arrivals and/or overnights		+	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-
	Lowest achievable territorial level	NUTS2	-	NUTS2	NUTS3	NUTS2	LAU2	NUTS0	NUTS0	LAU2	LAU2	opština	LAU2	LAU2	-
Capacity of tourist accommodations		+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-
	Lowest achievable territorial level	NUTS3	Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina; Republika Srpska;	NUTS3	NUTS3	NUTS3	LAU2	NUTS0	NUTS0	LAU2	LAU2	opština	LAU2	LAU2	-
Income <sup>2</sup>		+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	Lowest achievable territorial level	NUTS0	Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina; Republika Srpska; Brčko District	NUTS0	LAU2	NUTS0	LAU2	NUTS0	NUTS0	LAU2	NUTS2	NUTS2	NUTS3	LAU2	Raion
Commuting		-	-	+	+	-	+	-	-	+	-	+	+	+	-
	Lowest achievable territorial level	-	-	LAU2	LAU2	-	LAU2	-	-	LAU2	-	opština	LAU2	LAU2	-

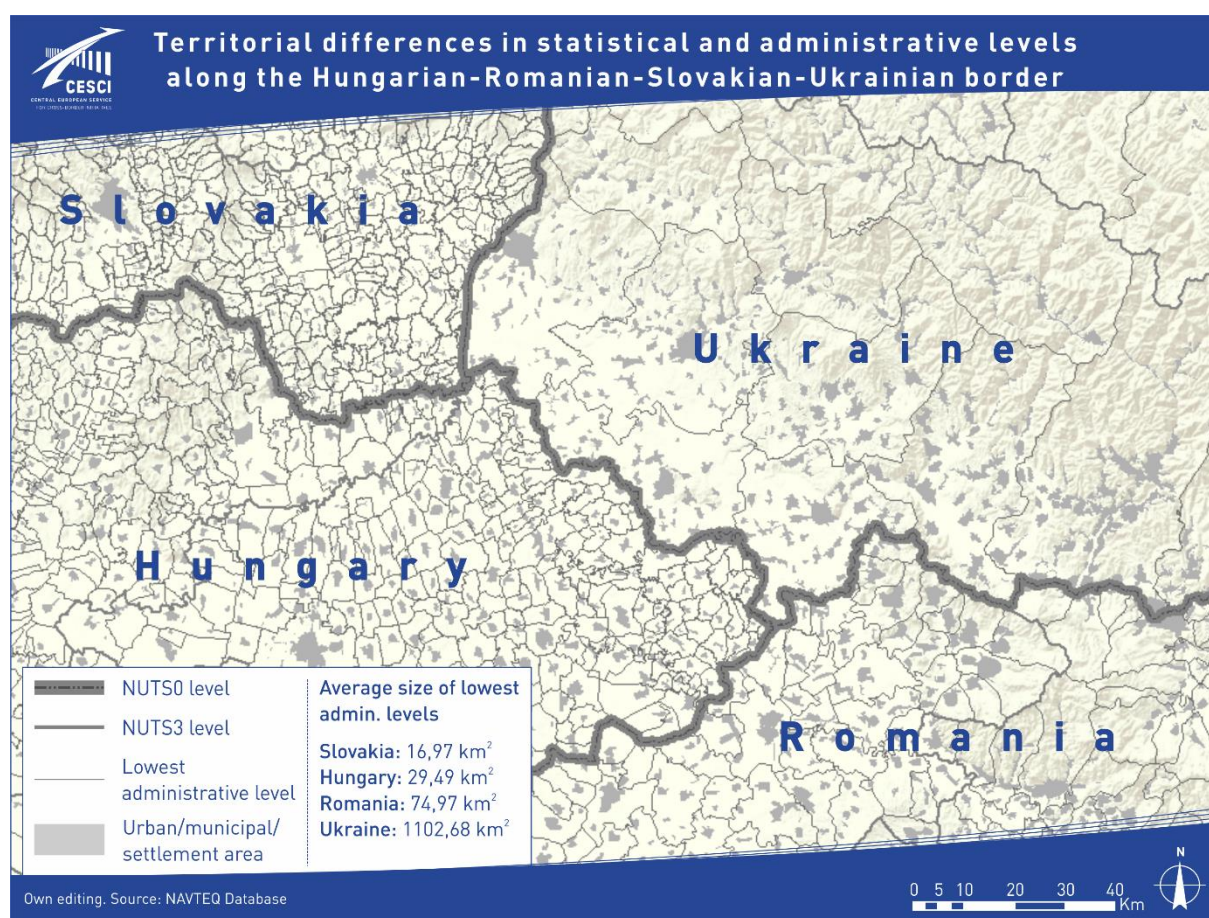
<sup>2</sup> Due to different data gathering methods caused by different national taxation, income data are not or hardly compatible. Different currencies also make it difficult to carry out income-based comparison.

		Austria	BiH	Bulgaria	Czech Republic	Croatia	Hungary	Moldova	Montenegro	Germany (relevant provinces)	Romania	Serbia	Slovakia	Slovenia	Ukraine (relevant 4 oblast)
Net migration		+	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	Lowest achievable territorial level	LAU2	-	LAU2	LAU2	NUTS3	LAU2	NUTS0	NUTS3	LAU2	LAU2	opština	LAU2	LAU2	Raion
Poverty rate		+	-	+	+	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	-
	Lowest achievable territorial level	NUTS2	-	NUTS2	NUTS2	NUTS2	NUTS2	-	-	NUTS2	NUTS2	NUTS0	NUTS2	NUTS2	-
HPI		+	-	+	+	-	+	-	-	+	+	-	+	+	-
	Lowest achievable territorial level	NUTS2	-	NUTS2	NUTS2	-	NUTS2	-	-	NUTS2	NUTS2	-	NUTS2	NUTS2	-
Number of employment by sectors		+	-	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	+
	Lowest achievable territorial level	NUTS3	-	NUTS3	NUTS3	NUTS3	LAU2	NUTS0	-	NUTS3	NUTS3	opština	NUTS3	LAU2	Raion

## Differences in the size of administrative units

Very frequent problem is that the territorial extension of neighbouring administrative units along the border is different. This phenomenon results from the organic evolution of the administrative systems of modern nation states and it cannot be tackled.

In Hungary and in Slovakia the majority of data are collected at settlement level. In Romania, the lowest administrative unit (comuna) from where the statistical data are available, unites several (sometimes 5-6) settlements. In Croatia, the number of settlements united in a municipality (općina) can reach even the number of 15. Without a unified, settlement level data processing methodology followed by all Member States, it is impossible to evaluate the socio-economic potential and capacities of the border municipalities.

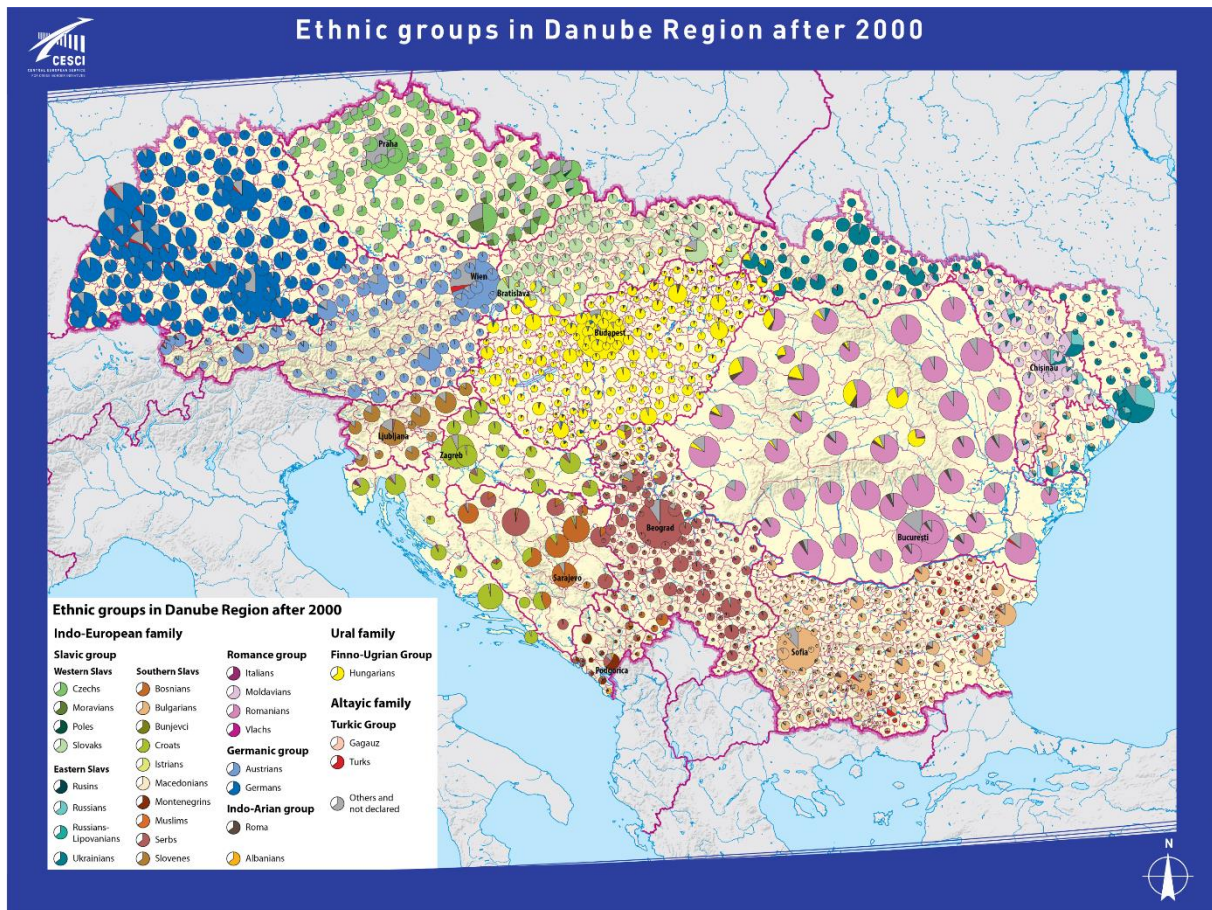


2. figure: Territorial differences in statistical and administrative levels along the Hungarian-Romanian-Slovakian-Ukrainian border

## Differences in gathering time of data

In spite of that the European Union defines the methods and timing of gathering the most important data, there can be still observed big differences between the practices followed by the Member States. In certain countries, the number of population is defined at the beginning (e.g. Hungary) in others at the end (e.g. Romania) of the year. It means that e.g. the data on the population of the year of 2015 mark one year difference, in this case.

Some countries have changed the content of the questionnaire between two censa (2001 and 2011). In Austria and Slovenia there are no longer questions related to ethnic belonging. The ethnic characteristics are measured by the notion 'nationality' in the most of the countries but in Germany the mother tongue, in Austria 'the most commonly spoken language' is asked from the interviewees. These are not fully consistent with each other, but all refers to ethnical trait, hence they may be considered similar. As relevant data are available for different period of time than in other countries, it makes impossible to plot a map describing the ethnic picture of the Danube River Basin.



3. figure: Ethnic groups in Danube Region after 2000 (source: National Census data - Austria: 2011, Bosnia and Herzegovina: est. 2013, Bulgaria: 2011, Czech Republic: 2011, Germany: 2011, Croatia: 2011, Hungary: 2011, Moldova: 2004, Montenegro: 2011, Romania: 2011, Serbia: 2011, Slovenia: 2002, Slovakia: 2011, Ukraine: 2001)



## Differences resulted from diverse legislative background

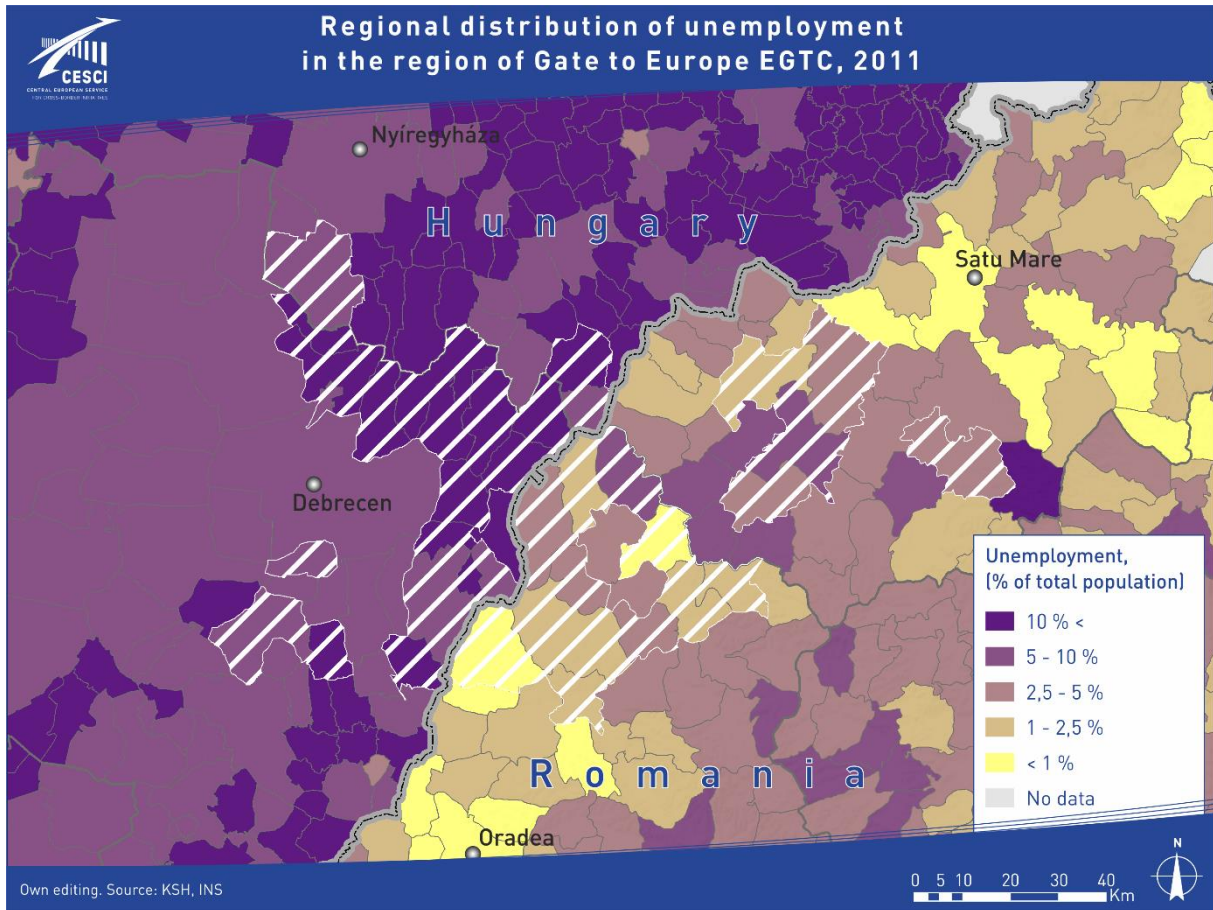
One of the most frequented and most exploited data on the social situation of the given territory is that of the employment rate. The incompatibility is caused in these cases by the differences between the retirement age, country by country. As a consequence, the rate of employment deviates in line with the moving age limit of retirement.

2. table: Official retirement age in different countries in the Danube River Basin, 2011-2015  
(source: [OECD](#) and <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/>)

Country	Men	Women
Austria	65	60
Bosnia and Herzegovina	no data	no data
Czech Republic	62,5	61,33
Germany	65,083	65,083
Hungary	63,5	63,5
Moldova	62	57
Montenegro	no data	no data
Romania	65	60
Serbia	65	60
Slovakia	62	59,75
Slovenia	63	61
Ukraine	60	56

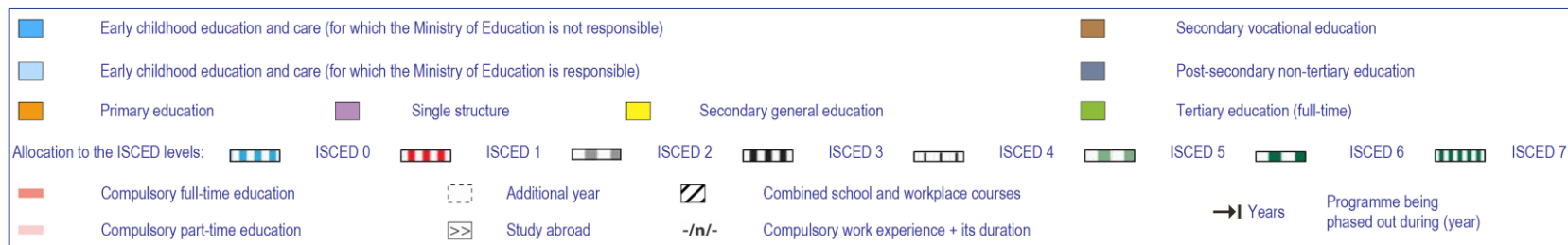
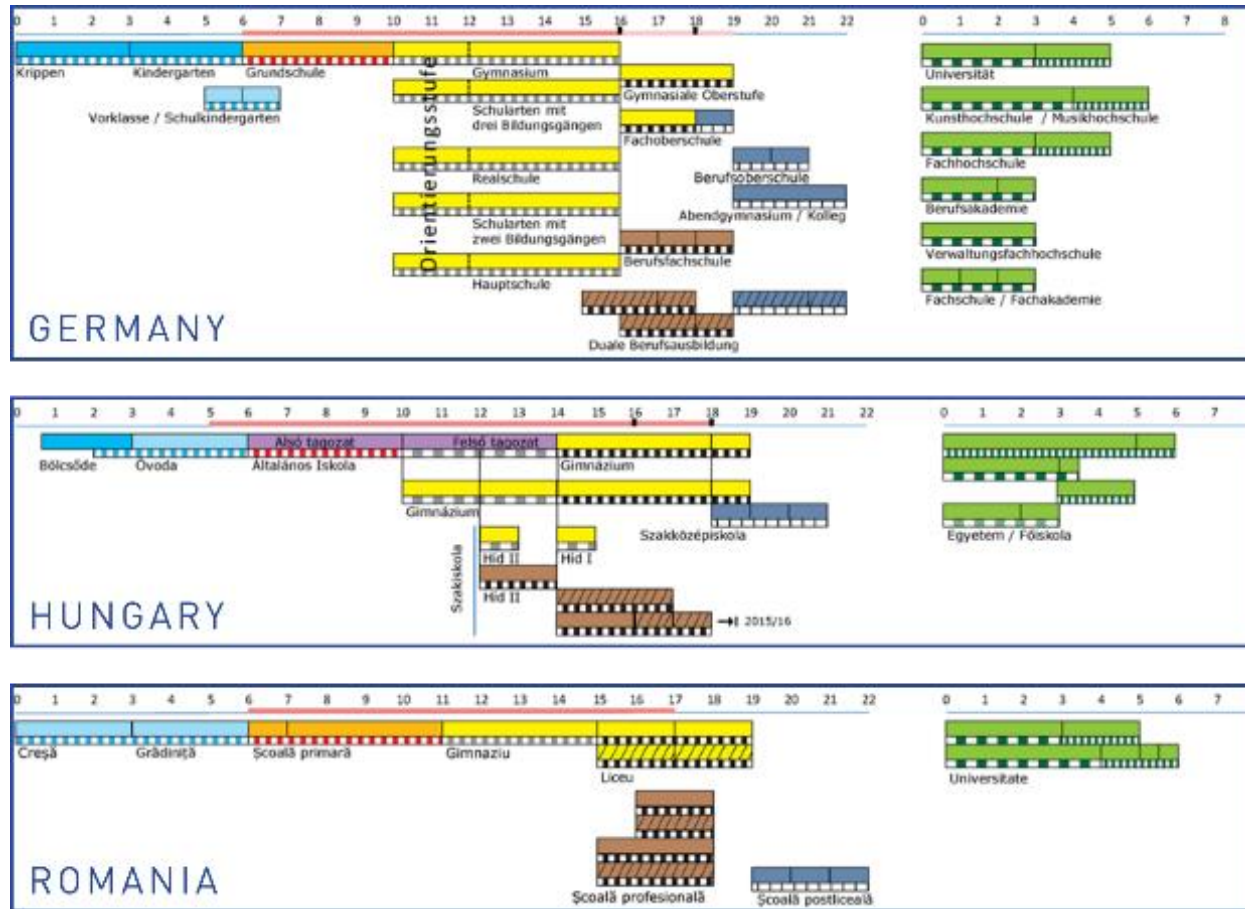
There are differences among the states in measuring unemployment – according to varied definition thereof. Sometimes, unemployment is linked to a certain length of employment status before losing the job. In other cases, unemployment does not cover the people able to cater themselves – regardless of their employment situation. For instance, in Romania the small farmers are encountered as employed in spite of that they are not employed by any company or institution<sup>3</sup>. As in Hungary the system is different, the results plotted on maps will necessarily be false.

<sup>3</sup> More precisely, according to the definition of „contributing family worker”: „Contributing family worker - is that person who carries out his activity within an economic family unit run by a family member or relative, not receiving remuneration as salary or pay in kind. Such a unit is considered peasant's (agricultural) household. If several persons of a household work in their own agricultural household, one of them - generally the household head - is considered self-employed, while the others are considered contributing family workers.” ([Labour Market In: Statistical Yearbook of Romania 2013.](#), p. 88)



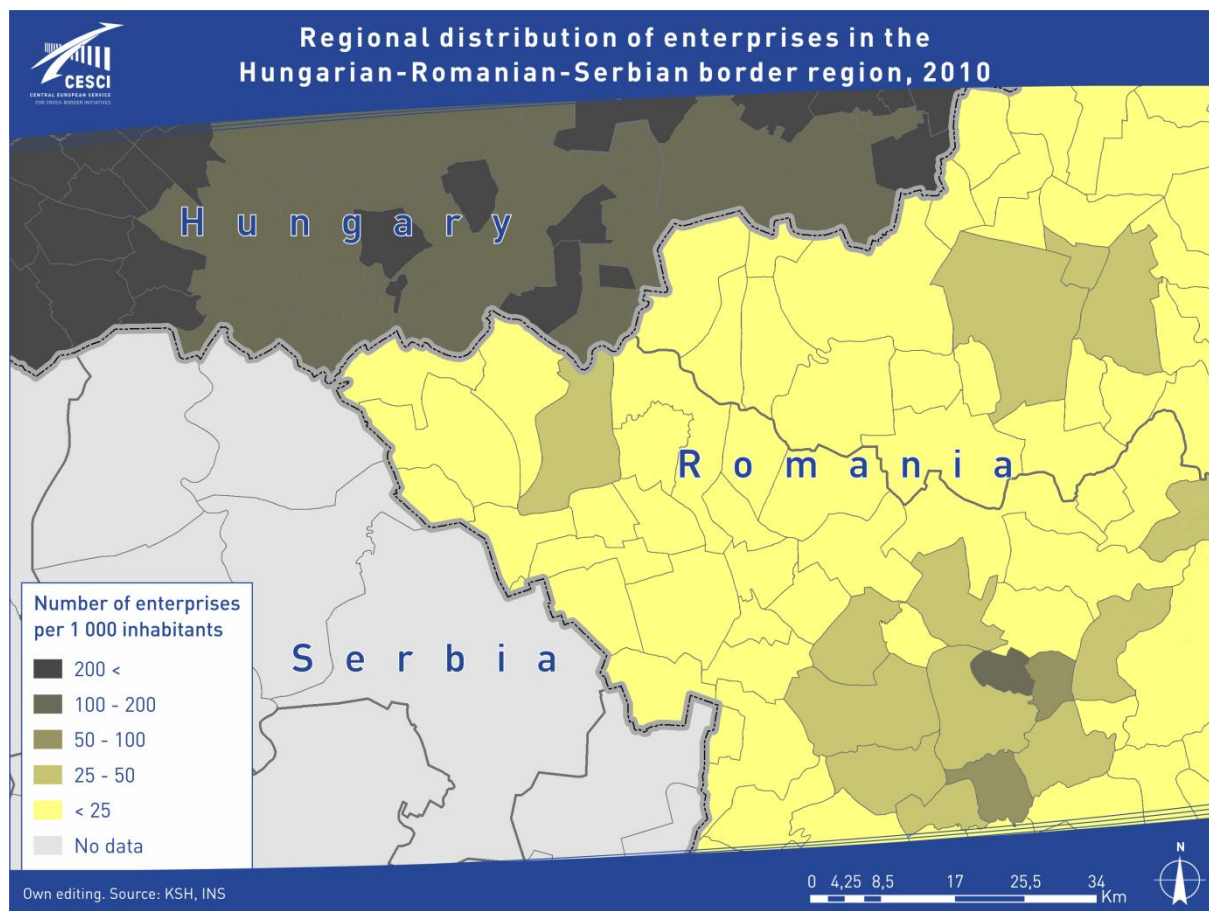
4. figure: Regional distribution of unemployment in the region of Gate to Europe EGTC, 2011

Similar problem is caused by the differences in educational system: the share of unemployment by qualification is not comparable. In some countries, the completion of the elementary school lasts for 8, in others 9 year. Also the vocational systems are different.



5. figure: Structure of education system in Germany, Hungary and Romania (source: [EURYDICE](#))

Sometimes definitions of undertakings show a big variety. The number of private entrepreneurs is included in the data of enterprises in Hungary but not in Romania.



6. Figure: Differences in the number of enterprises along the Hungarian-Romanian border area

## Lack of data on cross-border flows

In the case of CBC programmes, it is a crucial problem that the National Statistical Offices gather data at national level, following *nation state logic*. As the offices are not paid for gathering data on cross-border flows, it is almost impossible to measure the intensity of cross-border movements. It is the case in the field of labour migration: the experts cannot estimate the level of the permeability of the border from this aspect because there are not available data.

FDI is not measured at local level, consequently it is hard to estimate how cross-border flow of capital influences the development of the borderland.

After the border crossing control has been stopped in Schengen countries, also the traffic counting has been finished. The methods used to estimate the volume of the traffic are much less reliable than the itemised counting carried out previously. It is the reason why the data on border crossing has fallen to one fourth (12,4 million) in 2008 compared to previous years (40,2 million in 2007) in Slovak-Hungarian relation. It is not a simple methodological problem but that of the lack of cross-border monitoring, in general.

## Methodological problems with qualitative data

In case, there are no available quantitative data, qualitative ones are to be gathered from the ground. These surveys are most often realised by using questionnaires. For instance, to measure the level of intensity of cross-border cooperation questionnaires are used for, utilising different models of scaling. However, it cannot be ensured that the same people fill in the questionnaire at the beginning and at the end of the programming period (it would be the guarantee for the approximately same evaluating approach). In this situation, the results are not comparable. (It can happen that, at the end of the programming period, a new colleague will evaluate the intensity lower than his / her predecessor did.)

## Conclusion

Taking the problems enumerated below into account, we can summarise that the differences between the data collecting and data processing methods used by national statistical offices form a barrier hindering the description of a real picture on the borderlands and, in this way, it makes the elaboration of cross-border integrated strategies and to carry out territorial impact assessment in border regions very difficult.

There are obstacles which are not soluble. Regardless, in order to close the statistical datasets to each other, the Commission

- should start consultation with the national statistical offices and compile an inventory on the differences between national approaches;
- should start consultation professional organisations involved in cross-border developments and programming in order to identify an inventory of most important data and indicators needed for cross-border territorial analyses;
- based on the inventory, could develop a methodological study which forms recommendations addressed to the national statistical offices on the desired modifications and harmonisations;
- in parallel should start a larger discussion on the methodology used by Eurostat and find solutions for the measuring cross-border flows.