Arrabona EGTC

AEBR – AGEG – ARFE

SOLUTIONS

Funded by the European Union

Basic rules for water sports enthusiasts in the Hungarian–Slovak border region

2026

For organised or independent water-based tours in the Hungarian–Slovak border region, you must always check in which country's waters the trip takes place, what type of vessel the participants are using, whether a separate skipper or tour guide is required, what equipment must be provided, and whether there are any local or nature conservation restrictions along the route. Hungarian and Slovak regulations differ in several respects, so the same vessel or the same touring situation is not classified in the same way everywhere.

1. EQUIPMENT: WHAT IS MANDATORY, AND WHAT IS RECOMMENDED?

HUNGARY

- For boats, the following are generally mandatory: at least 1 oar; at least 1 life jacket, plus one additional life jacket for each child under 14 or person over 14 who cannot swim on board; 1 anchor or other mooring device; at least 10 running metres of rope or chain suitable for mooring and anchoring; and 1 water measuring bailing device with a capacity of at least 1 litre.
- On board the boat, life jackets must be worn by anyone under the age of 14, anyone who cannot swim, and anyone rowing whilst standing.
- In the case of kayaks and canoes, Hungarian regulations require that the principles applicable to boats be taken as the basis. Oars are compulsory; life jackets must be worn by persons under the age of 14, by those who cannot swim, and by anyone paddling whilst standing on the craft. An anchor, a 10-metre rope or chain, and a bailing device are not compulsory for kayaks and canoes.
- When using SUPs and other human-powered water sports equipment, users must, as a general rule, wear a life jacket. If the user is aged 14 or over and can swim, a flotation aid or safety ankle strap is sufficient in place of a life jacket.

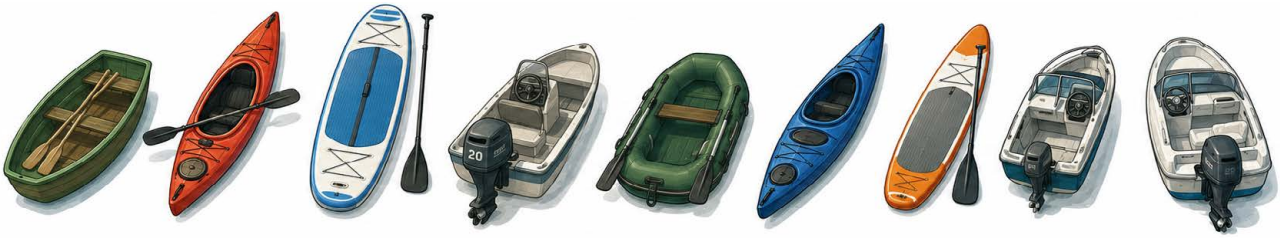
SLOVAKIA

- When it comes to equipment regulations, the first thing to clarify is whether the boat is registered or unregistered.
- For unregistered, non-motorised boats weighing less than 500 kg, the recommended equipment is: 2 oars or 1 paddle; 1 device suitable for bailing water or a sponge; 1 mooring rope or chain longer than 5 metres.
- In these boats, the owner's name and permanent address must be displayed in a clearly visible place.
- Mandatory equipment for registered small boats without a cabin: life jackets in a number corresponding to the permitted number of persons on board; 1 lifebuoy with at least 15 metres of rope or another rescue device; 1 device suitable for bailing out water, or a sponge, or a pump; 2 paddles or 2 oars; 2 mooring ropes, each at least 15 metres long; 1 boat hook; 1 first-aid kit; 1 anchor with a chain or a rope at least 20 metres long.
- Life jacket: On smaller, unregistered, non-motorised small craft weighing less than 500 kg, a life jacket is not a mandatory item of standard equipment. However, persons under the age of 15 and those who cannot swim must wear a life jacket; therefore, one life jacket per person must be provided for them. On open, registered small craft, a number of life jackets corresponding to the maximum permitted number of persons on board is mandatory.

2. OTHER NAVIGATION AND SAFETY REGULATIONS

HUNGARY

- The person operating the watercraft, as well as anyone involved in its operation or handling, must be fit to do so.
- It is prohibited to operate a watercraft or to hand over control to a person whose system contains alcohol resulting from the consumption of alcoholic beverages or any other substance with a similar effect. This prohibition also applies to those assisting in the operation or handling of the vessel.
- As a general rule, passengers in a moving boat must not stand. Exceptions may be made for rowing, using a boat hook, performing other work, or activities specific to the sport in question.
- Those on board the boat are obliged to follow the helmsman's instructions regarding safety and order.
- If the boat is travelling at night or in conditions of restricted visibility, a steerable white light must be used in addition to the mandatory basic equipment. The light from a mobile phone may only be considered as a backup or emergency solution; trip planning should not rely on this as the primary light source



SLOVAKIA

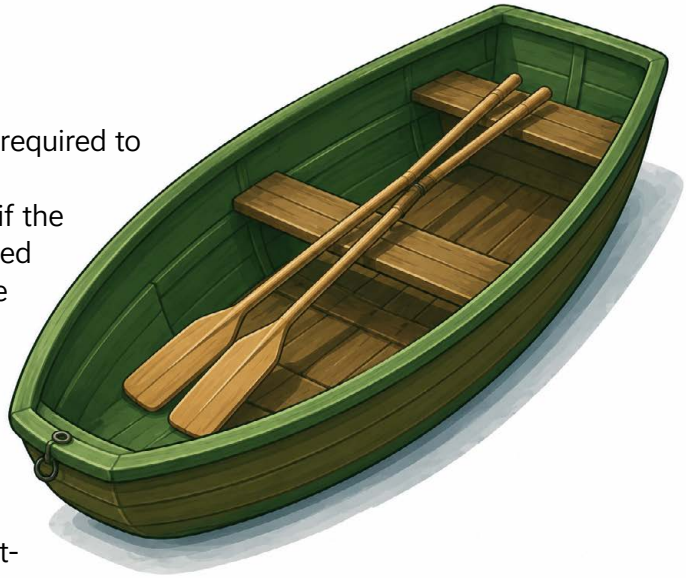
- The skipper and any persons assisting in the operation of the vessel must be in a physical and mental condition that is not adversely affected by fatigue, alcohol, medication or any other substance.
- The behaviour of persons on board must not endanger the vessel or navigation, nor must it hinder the skipper.
- Persons on board a small vessel are obliged to follow the skipper's instructions regarding safe navigation and order on board.
- At night, the relevant light-signalling rules also apply to small craft.
- In conditions of restricted visibility, a small vessel may only navigate if the necessary technical and communication facilities are available. For smaller recreational craft, this usually means in practice that navigation should be avoided under such circumstances.
- Certain waterways may be subject to specific navigation measures, so these must always be checked before setting off. It is also necessary to check whether the section in question is classified as a monitored or unmonitored waterway, as this affects the availability of navigability information and restrictions. The entire Slovak section of the Danube is a monitored waterway.

3. OPERATING CONDITIONS AND AGE RESTRICTIONS

HUNGARY

- A boat may be operated by anyone who is at least 14 years of age, can swim, has sufficient experience, is familiar with the characteristics of the waterway, and is familiar with the relevant navigation rules.
- If there are several people on board a boat or a water sports craft not subject to registration, a skipper must be appointed. In such cases, the skipper must be at least 16 years of age.
- In the case of a motorised boat, the minimum age for the operator is 17.
- A participant under the age of 14 who can swim may also operate a boat or a non-motorised water sports craft, but only under the guidance and supervision of a coach. In such cases, training and practice may only take place close to the shore, away from shipping lanes, or in designated areas.

SLOVAKIA



- It must be ascertained whether a licence is required to operate the craft.
- A small craft operator's licence is required if the vessel's total mass, including the permitted payload, exceeds 1,000 kg, or if the engine power is at least 4 kW, or if the sail area exceeds 12 m².
- For Category A, the minimum age for sitting the test is 15 years. For Categories B, C and D, the minimum age is 18 years.
- Applicants must complete a training course, pass an examination and submit a medical fitness certificate.
- Small boats used for sporting purposes may be operated without a licence, subject to certain conditions.
- It is important to note that in Slovakia, the thresholds for driver qualification and vehicle registration are not the same: driver qualification may be relevant from as low as 4 kW, whilst registration of a motor vehicle generally applies to vehicles with a power output of 11 kW or more.

4. ORGANISED WATER TOURS AND TOUR GUIDING

HUNGARY

- If more than 10 rowing craft are taking part in the trip and the group is travelling together in an organised manner, the trip may only be conducted by a water tour guide.
- Before setting off, the tour guide must notify the relevant local water police authority of the tour's commencement, the identity of the tour guide and the planned route.

- The tour guide's vessel must be marked with a 'U' code flag.
- A water tour organised in conditions of restricted visibility may not proceed.
- Participants are obliged to follow the tour leader's instructions regarding navigation.

SLOVAKIA

- Slovak regulations do not stipulate a separate, independent water tour guide qualification for leading organised rowing tours.
- In such cases, it must be checked whether operating the vessel in question requires a licence, who is deemed to be the actual operator of the vessel, whether there are any specific navigation regulations in force for the waterway concerned, and whether there are any specific navigation regulations in force for the waterway concerned, and whether

5. RECREATIONAL USE, TRANSPORT AND LAND- USE RESTRICTIONS

HUNGARY

- As a general rule, swimming is permitted wherever it is not prohibited. Swimming is prohibited, amongst other places, in shipping lanes; within a 100-metre radius of buoys marking shipping lanes and navigation obstacles, large vessels, floating work machinery and floating structures not intended for swimming; within 300 metres of weirs and waterworks; within 100 metres of bridges, water intake structures, other hydraulic structures, ferry and landing stages; ports, floating moorings, floating berths, boat jetties, mooring areas, water sports venues, seaplane bases and boat hoisting facilities, and within a 100-metre radius of these; at night and in conditions of restricted visibility, if the water surface is not illuminated; and wherever indicated by a prohibition sign.
- In border waters – such as the Hungarian–Slovak border sections – swimming is prohibited except at designated bathing areas; therefore, access to the water and rest stops must be planned in advance.
- The use of floating devices that do not qualify as boats or water sports equipment – such as toy boats, pedalos, banana boats or certain inflatable devices – is also considered swimming. The use of water sports equipment propelled by a motor or other means is not considered swimming.
- Floating devices may only be used in the vicinity of bathers in such a way that they do not endanger them.
- No course for water sports equipment may be marked out within 150 metres of the boundaries of a designated bathing area.
- It is prohibited to cross the path of a large vessel in motion or to approach it too closely whilst in a boat, small craft or water sports equipment, within the specified safety distance.
- Persons in the water must be given a safe distance, except in the case of a rescue.
- Before setting off, you must check whether there are any notices for boaters or announced events, construction works, etc. applicable to the route in question.

SLOVAKIA

- Before setting off, you must check whether the relevant waterway is open to small craft, whether any navigation measures are in force, and whether the section in question is subject to specific conditions of use or navigation.

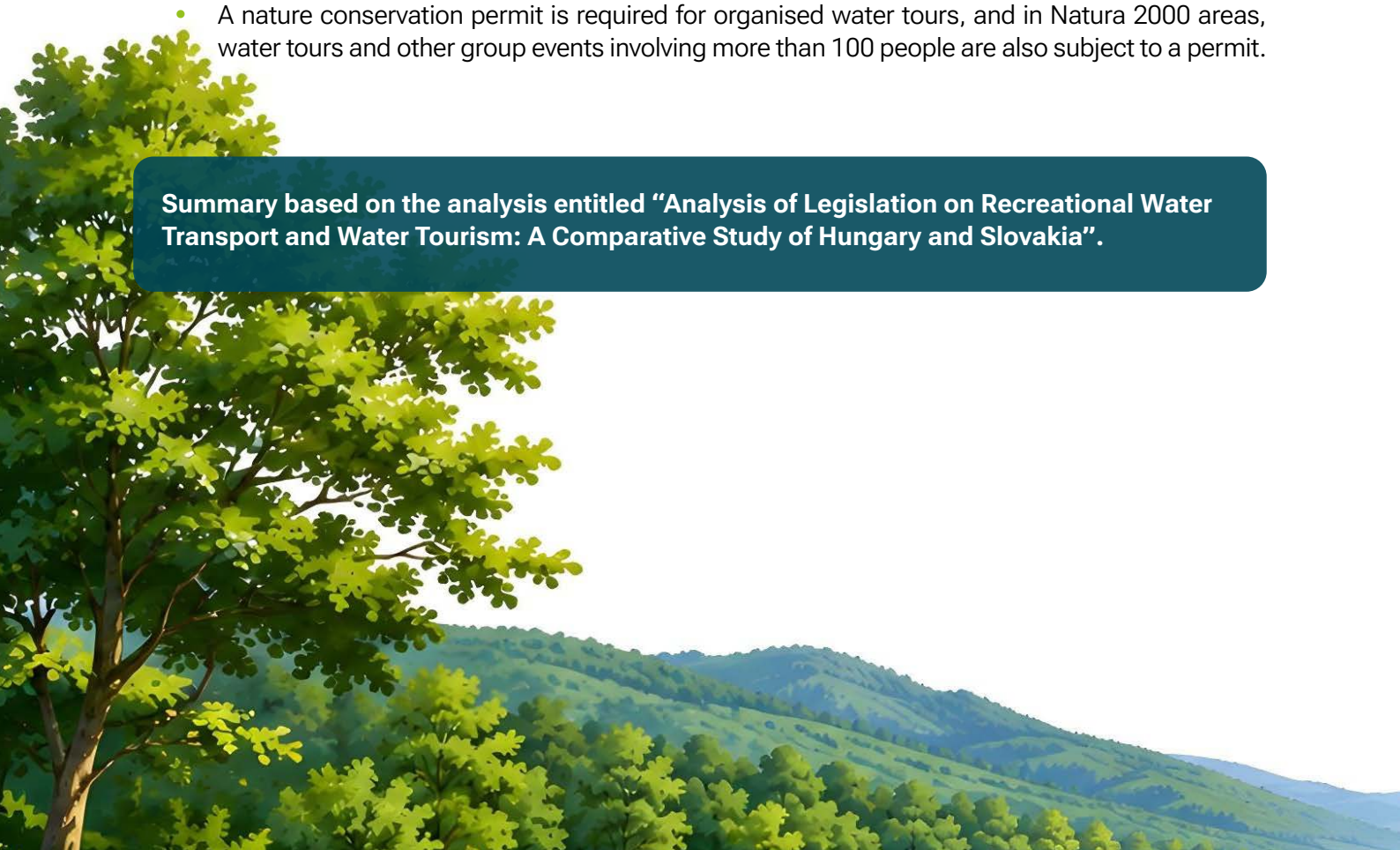
- In the Dunacsún–Gabčíkovo system, small craft must notify the lock control centre of their intention to pass through before entering the canal.
- Small craft without their own motorised propulsion are prohibited from navigating the approach canal; therefore, this section cannot be used by typical rowing craft.
- In Slovakia, before swimming, one should not check a single, standardised national list of prohibitions, but rather the status of the specific body of water, public health water quality information, navigation regulations and nature conservation restrictions.

6. NATURE CONSERVATION AND AREA-SPECIFIC RESTRICTIONS

HUNGARY

- Knowledge of navigation rules alone is not sufficient. It is also necessary to check whether the route passes through a protected natural area, a strictly protected area, a fish conservation area or is subject to other local restrictions.
- The nature conservation authority may restrict, suspend or prohibit activities that damage or seriously endanger a protected area.
- Temporary restrictions are often linked to the breeding season, sensitive habitats or other seasonal nature conservation considerations.
- During the closed season in fish conservation areas, no activities that interfere with the reproduction and development of fish may be carried out.
- According to official information, the fish ladders in the Szigetköz may not be used for swimming; mooring on the shoals is prohibited, and wild camping is not permitted.
- As a general rule, people may be on the water between 08:00 and 18:00; at Öregszigeti Lake, this is between 10:00 and 18:00.
- You must travel on the water causing as little disturbance as possible: making noise, shouting and listening to music are prohibited.
- A nature conservation permit is required for organised water tours, and in Natura 2000 areas, water tours and other group events involving more than 100 people are also subject to a permit.

Summary based on the analysis entitled "Analysis of Legislation on Recreational Water Transport and Water Tourism: A Comparative Study of Hungary and Slovakia".



SLOVAKIA

- In the Csallóköz region, water-based excursions may involve areas with varying levels of nature conservation protection; therefore, the specific section of the route must always be checked.
- It is not enough to check whether it is permitted to travel on the water; one must also check whether landing on the bank, resting, camping or other related activities are permitted.
- At protection level two, a nature conservation permit may be required for certain sporting and tourist events.
- From protection level three onwards, it becomes particularly important to determine whether movement off designated routes, camping, pitching tents, bivouacking or lighting fires is permitted.
- In protection levels four and five, the use of riverbanks, tributaries and landing sites is only permitted following a specific inspection.
- If the planned activity requires authorisation or a permit, this must be applied for from the nature conservation authority responsible for the area concerned.

7. WHERE SHOULD YOU OBTAIN INFORMATION BEFORE SETTING OFF?

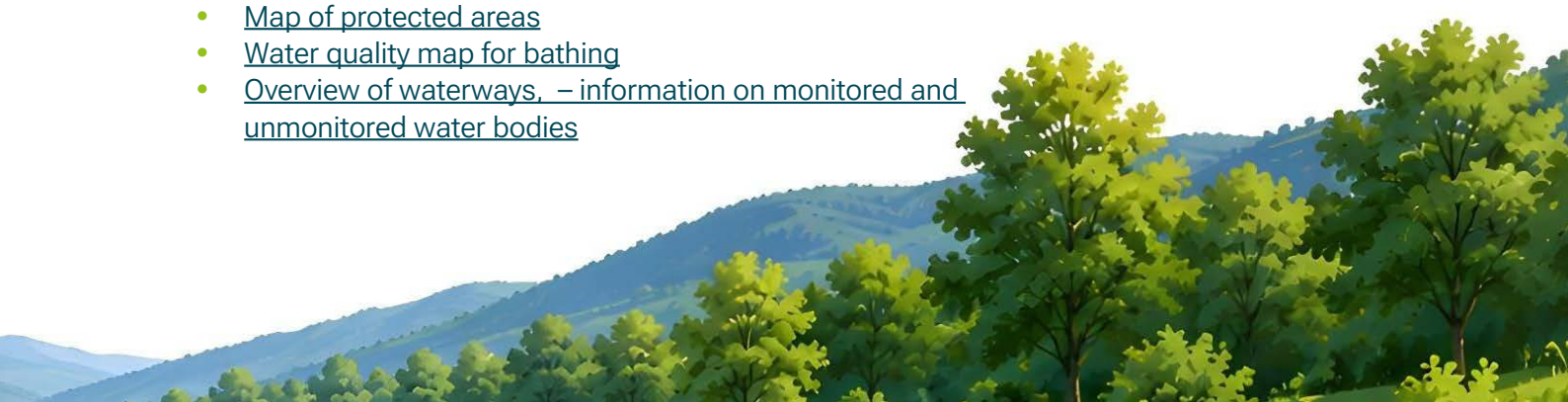
You must always check the current navigation, nature conservation and local usage regulations before setting off.

HUNGARY

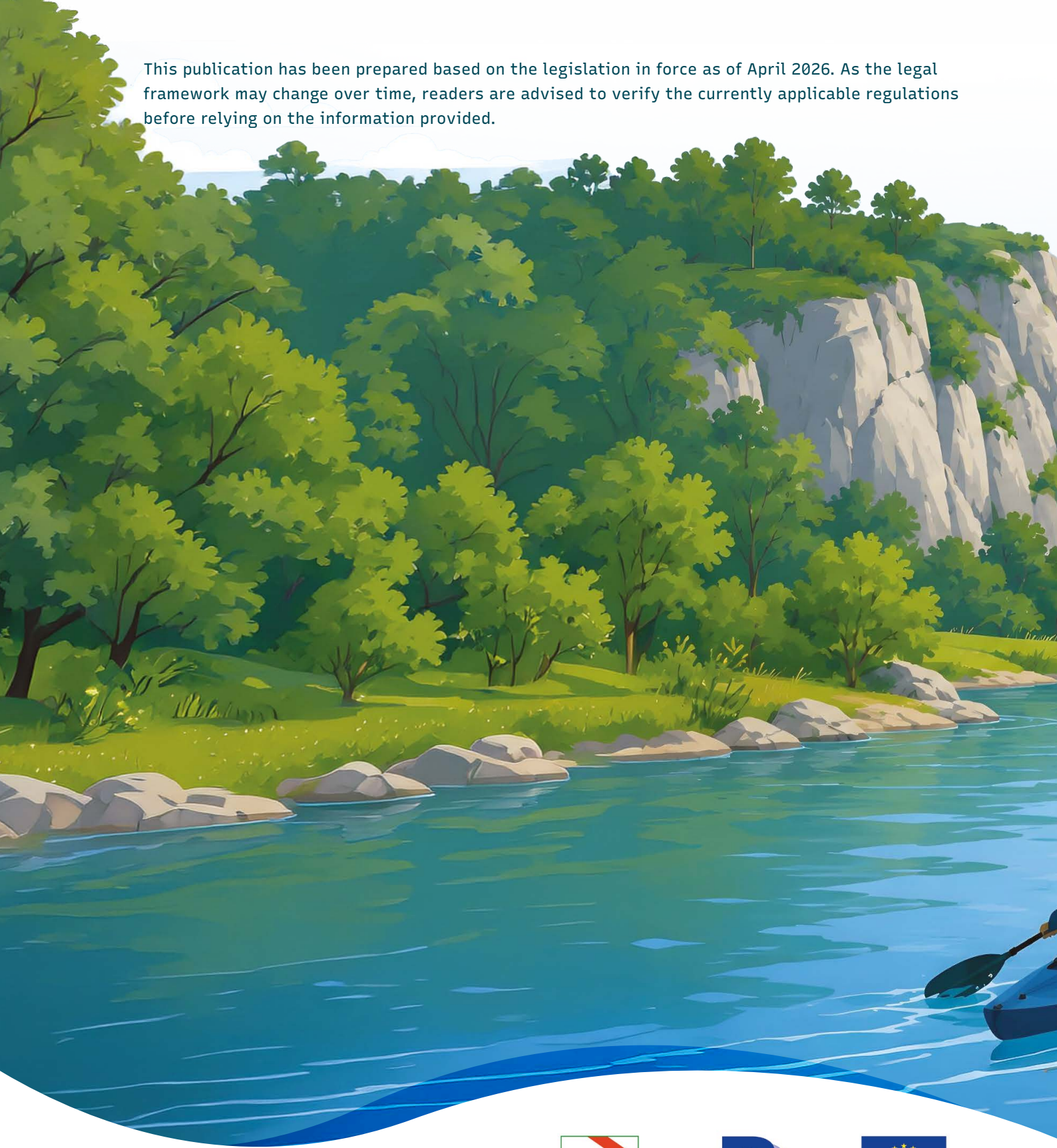
- Transport Authority notices for boaters
- Email address for water police notifications: dunaivizirendeszetirk@budapest.police.hu
- Information from nature conservation authorities / managers – Fertő–Hanság National Park
- Map of hiking trails in the Szigetköz
- Local fishing regulations – Standardised fishing regulations
- Local fishing map – County fishing map

SLOVAKIA

- Transport Authority (Dopravný úrad) – mandatory and recommended equipment for small vessels
- Transport Authority (Dopravný úrad) – Navigation Regulations
- Navigation regulations for enclosed water areas
- Transport Authority (Dopravný úrad) – Overview of enclosed water areas accessible to small craft
- Transport Authority (Dopravný úrad) – information on navigation safety
- Information from nature conservation managers – CHKO Dunajské luhy
- Map of protected areas
- Water quality map for bathing
- Overview of waterways, – information on monitored and unmonitored water bodies



This publication has been prepared based on the legislation in force as of April 2026. As the legal framework may change over time, readers are advised to verify the currently applicable regulations before relying on the information provided.



Arrabona EGTC

AEBR – AGEG – ARFE

B SOLUTIONS

Funded by the European Union

This publication is a summary of a study. The online version of the summary, as well as a useful checklist, are available at the following link:

Online version | PDF | Checklist HU | The study HU

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR). Neither the European Union nor the AEBR can be held responsible for them.