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## **Foreign Languages during Rescue Operations of the Hungarian Fire Service – Major Determinants and Educational Possibilities**

### **Abstract**

In the majority of countries, the fire departments are responsible for a wide variety of rescue actions, including fire incidents and technical rescue. Firefighters are normally the first to arrive at the scene of the incident. The broad range of skills and specialistic knowledge that these operations demand might be further expanded by the certain features of countries. Due to globalisation, it is more and more likely that non-natives become witnesses or victims of the incidents, thus the need for the foreign language knowledge among firefighters arises. Taking Hungary as an example, the paper specifies certain features of the countries where the likelihood of non-natives getting involved in incidents increases. Firstly, their locations and transport systems can make them favourable transit routes. Moreover, the high number of foreigners visiting either for a short term or a long term also contributes to this trend. The authors describe the potential impact of these features on the rescue actions. The paper identifies foreign language knowledge as an asset during the actions and specifies those positions within the staff of fire service who might have the contact with foreigners, resulting in a situation when the knowledge of a foreign language can support the effectiveness of their work.

**Keywords:** disaster management, fire service, rescue operations/interventios, internationalism, foreign languages

## Języki obce podczas interwencji Straży Pożarnej na Węgrzech – główne determinanty oraz możliwości edukacyjne

### Streszczenie:

W większości krajów, straże pożarne są odpowiedzialne za wszelkiego rodzaju interwencje, w tym pożary i ratownictwo techniczne. Zwykle strażacy jako pierwsi docierają na miejsce zdarzenia. Szeroki zakres umiejętności i wiedzy specjalistycznej, których te interwencje wymagają, mogą być rozszerzone o dodatkowe cechy charakterystyczne dla poszczególnych krajów. Ze względu na globalizację, prawdopodobieństwo, że świadkami zdarzenia bądź uszkodzonymi zostaną obokrajowcy, wzrasta. Dlatego też potrzeba znajomości języków obcych przez strażaków staje się coraz istotniejsza. Na przykładzie Węgier publikacja przedstawia charakterystykę krajów, w których wzrasta prawdopodobieństwo, iż na miejscu zdarzenia niekorzystnego znajdzie się obcokrajowiec. Wpływa na to przede wszystkim lokalizacja i system komunikacji, czyniąc owe kraje często wybieranymi trasami tranzytowymi. Ponadto, duża liczba turystów także przyczynia się do nasilenia tego trendu. Autorzy opisują potencjalny wpływ tychże cech na rozkład interwencji. Publikacja ukazuje znajomość języków obcych jako zaletę podczas prowadzenia działań ratowniczych i wskazuje na część personelu w straży pożarnej, która może mieć styczność z obcokrajowcami, w takiej zaś sytuacji znajomość języka obcego może wspomóc efektywność ich pracy.

**Słowa kluczowe:** zarządzanie w kryzysie, straż pożarna, interwencje, internacjonalizm, języki obce

### 1. INTRODUCTION

As a result of globalisation, tourism and international transport have gained a lot of momentum, in which the majority of countries take their share as well due to their favourable conditions. However, these trends place additional demands on these countries, such as the need for a higher percentage of foreign language speakers, not only to be able to reap the economic benefits, but also to guarantee the safety of both citizens and foreigners. Protecting them from natural and man-made disasters and fires is the task of fire service. Efforts

to increase the effectiveness of interventions mainly focus on the training of intervention units to develop their skills and on advanced equipment and protective clothing, but due emphasis has to be paid to another crucial factor, that is, gathering as much information as possible to assist decision-making. As the emergency callers, eyewitnesses and surviving victims are sources of information, in incidents involving non-natives, foreign languages might be one of the sources of information. After illustrating the broad spectrum of interventions and the impact of tourism and international transport may have on them, this paper attempts to specify the positions in fire service that may involve using a foreign language in interventions.

## 2. INTERVENTIONS PERFORMED BY FIRE DEPARTMENTS

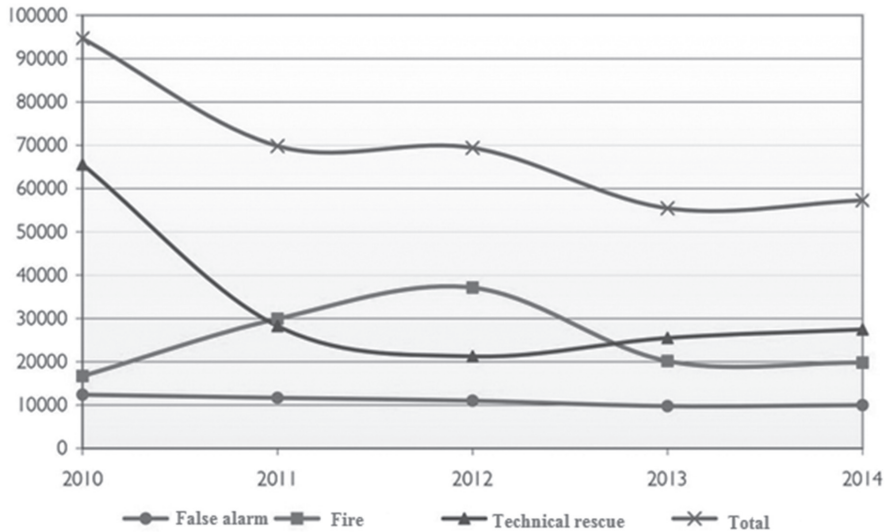
In the field of fire and rescue services, fire brigades are responsible for first response. The two main groups of their activities are fire incidents and technical rescue. Technical rescue includes a wide range of incidents, such as structural collapse, storm damage or traffic accidents often in the presence of dangerous materials whether on the road or railways, just to give a few examples and illustrate the broad nature of the term “technical rescue” and the wide range of interventions fire service is involved in.

Figure 1 depicts the distribution of fire calls in Hungary to which fire fighters responded in 2010–2014. [1] The majority of interventions, almost half of them involved technical rescue. It even outnumbered fire incidents, which is the type of activity most commonly associated with fire brigades.

Therefore, the recruitment process of fire fighters takes into account several skills. They need to pass rigorous examinations where their medical suitability, physical fitness and psychological readiness are under scrutiny. The selected applicants then have to acquire highly specialised and extensive skills and knowledge. [2] Currently foreign language knowledge is not on the list of skills needed to perform firefighting interventions, and obviously it will never deserve to be among the core skills. Nevertheless, if we have a look at the environment in which the interventions happen, it becomes apparent that in certain cases foreign language knowledge may contribute to effective interventions.

The success of the intervention, which means that there is no casualty and financial loss is minimised, is heavily dependent on the information the

intervention team has on the nature and circumstances of the incident. The more is known, the more reliable decisions can be made.



**Fig. 1** The distribution of fire calls in 2010–2014 in Hungary

Source: [1]

### 3. IMPACTS OF TOURISM AND TRANSPORT ON FIRE SERVICE INTERVENTIONS

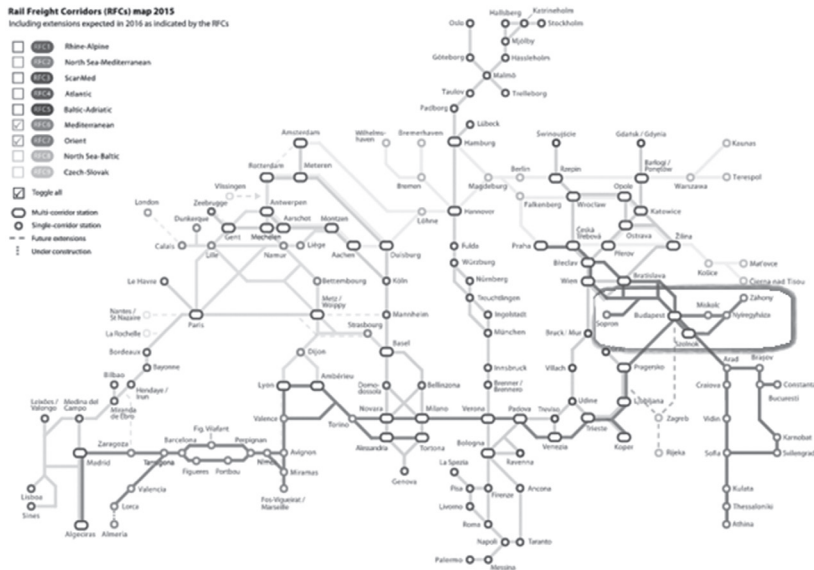
European Union statistics tell that 61.1% of its population took part in tourism for personal purposes, 25% of which travelled abroad [3]. According to the figures of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office, the annual number of foreign visitors to Hungary was close to 46 million in 2014 [4]. The number of foreign residents residing in Hungary was between 139,700 and 206,909 in the past ten years [5]. Although no relevant figures are available, the considerable amount of tourists and foreign residents in Hungary suggests that it is highly probable that incidents requiring firefighters interventions involve non-natives as well, either as victims or as eyewitnesses, who can provide valuable information on the circumstances.

In addition to the considerable number of foreigners, another predisposing factor for interventions involving non-natives is the fact that Europe is woven by railway and road networks, where a considerable part of international traffic and dangerous goods transport take place. Although they are potential sources of accidents, their advantages far outweigh the risks posed by them. Therefore, the European Union supports the construction and improvement of transport infrastructure through the Innovations and Networks Executive Agency [6].

Hungary can be considered a transit country for freight transportation due to various characteristics. Located in Central and Eastern Europe, it serves as a connecting link between Western and Eastern Europe, or by widening our perspective, between Europe and Asia. In addition to its location, its terrain is also well-suited for transportation with the predominantly plain areas as opposed to the mountainous regions of the neighbouring countries. Moreover, Hungary boasts an extensive transport network that basically covers the whole country and provides connections to international networks. Among these networks, our road and railway networks are worth mentioning.

### *3.1. Railway network of Hungary*

Hungary is a member of several international organisations that set out to facilitate, advance and coordinate international freight transportation by rail, the most important ones being Coordinating Council on Trans-Siberian Transportation (CCTT) International Association, Organisation for Cooperation between Railways (OSJD) and RailNetEurope (RNE). [7] The two former organisations deal with intercontinental railway transportation involving Asia and Europe, while the latter one attempts to harmonise it within Europe. CCTT held its 22<sup>nd</sup> conference in Budapest in 2013, where Hungary expressed its aspirations to become a key transit country between the East and the West. Hungary participates in the European railway transport with two of the rail freight corridors running through the country of the altogether nine RNE corridors. One is the Orient Corridor that starts from the Czech Republic and ends in Greece, while the other is the Mediterranean Corridor that starts in Spain and ends in Záhony, at the Eastern border of Hungary. [8]



**Fig. 2** Rail Freight Corridors in Europe and Hungary's involvement in it

Source: [7]

### 3.2. Road network of Hungary

The European Conference of Ministers of Transport (ECMT), whose goal is to establish and develop the integrated European transport system, evaluated Hungary in a National Peer Review a decade ago when EU accession was round the corner. They were satisfied with the density of the railway network, which was well above the average in OECD countries (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). However, they surpassed the Hungarian network in terms of quality. The same applied to our road network, as in the total length of paved roads Hungary ranked high, yet if we narrow down the range to focus only on motorways, Hungary was well below the average in Western Europe. [9] Since then, over the last decade, the length of motorways has almost tripled [10]. EU accession and the resulting aspirations to be a part of the motorway network of Europe triggered a boost in the extension of the motorway system. Basically, the capital city serves as the focal point of the motorways and from this hub all neighbouring countries are accessible, as the motorways reach the borders.



**Fig. 3** Hungary's motorway network

Source: [11]

To sum up, a country's location and transportation facilities are assets that might make it more attractive to freight companies. It results in an increased volume of traffic, which may give rise to a higher number of accidents potentially involving hazardous materials. Fortunately, it has been long recognised that the transportation of hazardous materials needs to be internationally regulated and harmonised. For this purpose, various European agreements were signed concerning the international carriage of dangerous goods by different transportation methods, namely ADR<sup>1</sup> by road, RID<sup>2</sup> by rail, ADN<sup>3</sup> by inland waterways and ICAO TI<sup>4</sup> or IATA DGR<sup>5</sup> by air. Standardised pictograms and UN numbers help identify dangerous materials without having

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1 European Agreement concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road

2 Regulations concerning the International Railway Transport of Dangerous Goods

3 European Agreement concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Inland Waterways

4 The International Civil Aviation Organization Technical Instructions for the Safe Transport of Dangerous Goods by Air

5 Provisions concerning Transport of Dangerous Goods in the International Air Transport

to be completely relied on the driver who may or may not be in a state to provide information on the circumstances and who may or may not speak the intervention unit's mother tongue.

#### 4. POSITIONS AT THE FIRE SERVICE REQUIRING FOREIGN LANGUAGE SKILLS

All the above factors prove that we need to be prepared for the possibility that not only the native language is used in an intervention, whether it is a fire incident or technical rescue, to gather information or to communicate with the victims. A country's involvement in international traffic and transport and the high number of visitors and foreign residents living there increase the possibility of incidents when foreign language knowledge may contribute to a more targeted and effective intervention. Intervention units are aware that they may encounter circumstances on the scene which are unexpected and they need to make quick decisions accordingly. However, foreign languages may be a tool to gather as much information as possible to support decision making.

Therefore, it is necessary to identify those segments of the organisation of fire service which are in frequent contact with victims – who might not be native speakers. Figure 4 below is a compilation of officers in the Fire Service of Hungary, categorised according to the level where their workplace is situated in the organisation of disaster management, yielding two groups for the purposes of the paper, local and county levels.

As the jobs above the thick line in Figure 4 require shifts, it is essential that foreign language speakers are available in each shift. Altogether, there are three teams or platoons of firefighters, A, B and C, which work on a rotating shift schedule. One platoon is on-duty for 24 hours and off-duty for 48 hours. This system guarantees that fire fighters with similar preparedness and qualifications can be deployed at all times. Each unit includes a shift commander with higher education qualification, which means that three such officers are required to continuously fulfil this position. In case of absence (training, vacation, sick leave) they are always replaced by a subordinate, for example the squad leader, who is an officer as well. At fire stations there are considerably fewer officers with higher education qualification, resulting in a lower number of foreign language speakers.



| Local level  | County level  |
|--|---|
| squad leader   | fire operations clerks perform basic tasks related to operations and their administration, but a high school diploma is sufficient for this position, a degree (thus, a language certificate) is not required |
| shift commander  | on-duty fire operations officers and chief communications officer, who receive fire emergency calls or the calls are redirected to them   |
| fire chief and his deputy in case of a major fire (2 <sup>nd</sup> -alarm fire at least) or perhaps a technical safety officer | leader of the Disaster Management Operations Unit and his deputy (who respond to 2 <sup>nd</sup> or higher-alarm fires)   |
| head of the disaster management branch office in case of a 3 <sup>rd</sup> – alarm fire  |   |
| county management takes over the operation in case of 4 <sup>th</sup> or 5 <sup>th</sup> -alarm fire                           |   |

**Fig. 4** Positions at the Fire Service of Hungary that might require foreign language skills in interventions

Source: Authors' compilation

2015 Act XLII of Hungary on the Service Status of Professional Members of Law Enforcement [12] – similarly to the previous act – sets out that a degree is required to advance to an officer rank (from second lieutenant), whose prerequisite is, in turn, a language exam certificate. This act applies not only to the fire service but to other law enforcement organs as well. Hungary as one of the gates to the Schengen area manages an increased number of foreigners at the borders [13].

The new emerging demands related to foreign language skills must be addressed during trainings and education. At the Institute of Disaster Management, National University of Public Service, Budapest, Hungary students acquire specialist knowledge in the field of fire services, or more broadly, disaster management. [14] [15] In addition, due emphasis is placed on foreign

language acquisition. During the three-year bachelor programme, the foreign language course lasts for five terms with 300 lessons, whose goal is to prepare students for the language exam and also to equip them with the terminology of disaster management so that foreign language will not hinder them from widening their perspectives in their profession. In this sense, the system of teaching foreign languages for military purposes sets an example worth following. As human interoperability is at the core of NATO needs, the common training systems are preceded by the national military education and training as well as the language training, which may be later supplemented by the NATO Staff Officers' Military Terminology Course. [16]

## CONCLUSION

The article has shown that certain features of a country, such as its location, terrain and extensive transport system facilitate tourism and international transport, which raise the number of non-native speakers present in the country. By demonstrating it through the example of Hungary, the authors focus on the impact of these features on fire service interventions and in response to these needs, they present a true and fair view on positions which might require foreign language knowledge to contribute to the effectiveness of interventions by ensuring access to more information in interventions involving non-native speakers. Finally, it is demonstrated how these requirements can be incorporated into the curriculum of a higher education institution to prepare future officers for the challenges they might face in their profession.

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