



SAMARITAN INTERNATIONAL (SAM.I.) is a European network of 20 non-profit non-governmental organisations from 19 European countries. We are politically and religiously unaffiliated and cooperate across borders within our network, on a regional, bilateral, and multilateral basis. Our members are active in the areas of social services, first aid and rescue services, civil protection, humanitarian aid, youth work, and volunteer management. Our work is conducted with the support of about three million individual members and almost 150.000 volunteers.

Samaritan International welcomes the European Committee of the Regions' initiative to draft a report on "Solving obstacles to the cooperation of emergency services in the EU's border regions".

As a European network of aid- and welfare organisations, many of which conduct rescue or emergency services, patient transport or civil protection missions as part of their core activities, SAM.I. considers that a robust European framework is needed to enable both staff and volunteers to act confidently and efficiently in a cross-border emergency. The current patchwork of bi-lateral agreements does not provide sufficient legal certainty. SAM.I. strongly believes that the issue should be addressed in a more strategic way at the European level, in cooperation with the Member States.

For Samaritan International, the main objective has to be, that both volunteers and staff can respond to any emergency without hesitation and without the worry whether they will be held liable if something goes wrong.

The many issues that can potentially arise in cross-border emergency responses range from technical obstacles, financial questions, recognition of professional competences, legal responsibilities in cases of accidents, required driving licenses, language barriers, etc. These issues are not exclusively encountered in cross-border emergencies, but also in the field of disaster response and civil protection.

As natural disasters have been increasing in frequency and magnitude, cross-border cooperation will be even more indispensable in the future. While there are certainly many differences between the civil protection sector and emergency medical services, SAM.I. still recommends taking inspiration from agreements and legal provisions in the field of disaster response and civil protection cooperation.

The picture is further complicated by differences in the competences to deal with the many issues linked to cross-border emergency response. Therefore, SAM.I. calls for a **European strategy**, outlining the various obstacles that need to be addressed, and which is rested on two pillars:

- EU Competence
For matters under EU Competence, the strategy should pinpoint which EU legislation needs to be revised. A good example is the revision of the driving licences directive, where SAM.I. has been advocating for a European approach to ambulance driving licences. Other areas could include technical specifications of vehicles or the approval of medicines.
- Member State Competence/Regional Competence
For matters under national or regional competence, the strategy should include guidelines for national/regional bi-lateral agreements. These guidelines should address the different topics that need to be covered by such agreements, as well as list best practices.

Samaritan International is looking forward to working with the CoR and supports a scaling-up of this initiative towards the other EU institutions.