

# HUNGARY

## KEY STATISTICS

To indicate the number of people affected by housing exclusion, we need to take into consideration several widely different life circumstances. The life situations described here are classified according to the ETHOS conceptual categories and the indicated number of the stakeholders are based on the publicly available database of the housing-related social services and the results of the research that has been carried out in connection to this subject.

### *People living roofless and houseless*

ETHOS 1-3 (people living rough, people in emergency accommodation, people in accommodation for the homeless): each year since 1999, a unique survey research process is carried out among the users of the Hungarian homeless service sector. On the same day in every year questionnaires are carried out among rough-sleepers and users of night shelters and temporary hostels. It is not a census about the people living in homelessness, but the results gained from the research give us an insight into this living situation. On the 3rd of February in 2020 there were 7,604 answered questionnaires from people experiencing homelessness. Their living situation is shown in the table below<sup>1</sup>:

	Night shelters and hostels (ETHOS 2-3)	On the street (ETHOS 1)	Together
Capital	2330	737	3067
Country towns	3170	1367	4537
Together	5500	2104	7604

<sup>1</sup> Source: Büntető törvény után – világgjárvány előtt - Jelentés a hajléktalan emberek - Report about the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February research in 2020 by Győri Péter

The survey was not answered by all of those who used the services on this day, but the research team estimated according to the traffic data of the service facilities that at least 15,000 people lived on the street or in shelters and hostels on a particular day in the beginning of 2020.

ETHOS 4 (people in women's shelter): The services providing accommodation within the Hungarian homeless service provision accept only people over the age of 18. Families with children cannot stay together in these services. Temporary hostels for families operate within the child protection system and the classification used by the social authorities does not consider the users of these hostels as people experiencing homelessness. In 2020 these services provided a total of 4,229<sup>2</sup> placements at any given time. Because families are admitted from a waiting list, we can assume full occupancy.

ETHOS 5 (people in accommodation for immigrants): In Hungary there are 2 institutions - 'reception stations' - run by the state authorities that provide placement for migrants and refugees. Only people with the official status of protected person or refugee can stay here for 30 days. According to the current regulation migrants can apply for refugee status only from the transit zones where a limited number of people can enter and stay at the same period while the applications are refused without substantive examination if the applicant previously passed a secure third country. Because all neighboring countries are classified as this from the transit zone it is impossible to have the refugee status. There is a database on the immigration control measures on the website of the Hungarian Police<sup>3</sup>. Due to the legislative set-up only 3 applications for refugee status occurred in 2020. Based on the insignificant number of applications received, it can be clearly stated that the capacity of the reception stations is are currently unused in Hungary.

ETHOS 6 (people due to be released from institutions): We do not have any research from a particular year about the number of people who have left health care, childcare or penitentiary institutions while also facing homelessness or

<sup>2</sup> Source: Database of the Platform of Social Sector (Szociális Ágazati Portál)

<sup>3</sup> Source: <http://www.police.hu/hu/a-rendorsegrol/statisztikak/hatarrendeszet>

housing deprivation. The earlier mentioned February 3rd research questioned people about the cause of their homelessness. 2,3 % of the answers indicated that their placement at hospital or care home was terminated, 3% claimed that the cause was releasing from prison, while 4% pointed that they have become homeless after leaving childcare. They were not asked when they left these institutions, but it can be stated that homelessness began with the termination of institutional placement for almost one tenth of those surveyed. (Among the homeless population the proportion of those who had been in childcare is much higher than this: overall, 24 % answered that they were in childcare on either a short-term or long-term basis during childhood, while this figure rises to approximately 50% among those under the age of 29.)

ETHOS 7 (people receive longer-term support): People experiencing homelessness do not have access to a housing allowance that could support them to exit homelessness, although housing allowance is available to individual homeless people for a maximum of one year. Aside from this, some organisations provide long-term housing support for their clients and some of them use the Housing First approach. There are 2 EU-funded operation programs in progress that aim to strengthen the Housing First approach. Altogether 15 organisations have received funding but data on their effectiveness is not yet publicly available. According to data,<sup>4</sup> 9 organisations supported a total of 201 clients. (From surveying the others we cannot estimate the number of involved clients as 3 did not give this information, while the remainder only gave the total number of days that their long-term housing support projects had been running for). The other form of the long-term support is the residential care institutions for elderly homeless people. There is a total of 456 places in 14 institutions<sup>5</sup> providing this service.

### *People live in insecure housing situation*

ETHOS 8 (people living in insecure accommodation): There are obstacles in presenting concrete data about those whose living situations come under this category (temporarily with family and friends, no legal tenancy, illegal occupation of land) because of the lack of research regarding this topic. Although the Hungarian Central Statistical Office publishes data about adults who still live with their parents, we have no insight into the causes

---

<sup>4</sup> Source: [https://www.palyazat.gov.hu/tamogatott\\_projektkereso](https://www.palyazat.gov.hu/tamogatott_projektkereso)

<sup>5</sup> Source: Database of the Platform of Social Sector (Szociális Ágazati Portál)

behind the figures and cannot gauge the proportion of adults living with their parents due to barriers in finding or maintaining their own housing.

The legislation around tenancy leaves a high degree of freedom to the parties draw up a contract and the only requirement for the validity of the contract that is it has to be written down. As such, supposedly in most cases there is a written contract between tenant and landlord, but we do not have an idea of the number of those cases in which the rights of the tenants are breached. Besides this, there is no data available about those who live in illegally occupied dwellings.

ETHOS 9 (People living under the threat of eviction): The Habitat for Humanity Hungary publish a report about housing poverty in Hungary every year. Their work is based on official statistics databases. According to their report in 2020 20% of households are overburdened by housing costs.

- Housing loan arrears over 90 days: 102,000 debtors
- Personal loan arrears over 90 days: 71,000 debtors
- Utility expenses arrears over 60 days: 420,000 households

Between 2016-2019 on average 3,368 people have been evicted, most often as a consequence of debt related property auction. (Nationwide there were 3,474 evictions in 2016, 2,667 in 2017, 3,212 in 2018 and 3,117 in 2019.) The evictions often happened because of small amounts of debt (Under 5,000,000 Ft which is equal around 15,000 euro.) and in most cases debtors had different kind of debts at the same time. In 60% of the cases the value of the property did not cover the amount of debt and this fact leads us to conclude that those who are in bad financial situation are those most affected by eviction and the cases of housing loss are debt and poverty.

ETHOS 10: (People living under the threat of violence) The estimated number of people affected is derived from the research about violence against women carried out by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights in 2012<sup>6</sup> because more recent figures are not available. Comparing these figures with those of the census from 2011, the

<sup>6</sup> Violence against women according the data of FRA research, census in 2011 and criminal statistics (2015) <https://nokjoga.hu/wp-content/uploads/nane-fra-nepesseg-enyubs-final-2014-w-w-2015jun19.pdf>

picture shows that 6% of women between 20-74 years old experienced intimate partner violence in 2012. Data from the Integrated Statistic of the Investigator Authorities in 2014 shows that the registered offences only account for 0.05% of the results gained from the FRA research.

### *People live among inadequate housing circumstances*

ETHOS 11-12 (people living in temporary/non-conventional structures, people living in unfit housing): The data published every year by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office show a continuous development in the physical housing conditions. According to this data the amount of people affected by poor material housing conditions is steadily decreasing. In 2016, 174,000 people lived in dwellings with either no toilet, no bath or neither. As well as this, 25-28,000 people lived in other forms of unfit buildings.<sup>7</sup>

ETHOS 13 (people living in extreme over-crowding): The Hungarian Central Statistical Office's latest data about the people living in extreme over-crowded housing circumstances are from 2019. According to this 20% of the Hungarian population live extremely in over-crowded conditions. This figure rises to 34% among those who are under 18<sup>8</sup>.

## INCREASE/DECREASE IN NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

The 3rd of February research measures how many people use homeless services on a particular day. According to this there is not significant change in this number in recent years. Since 2012, 7-8,000 people have responded to the questionnaires every year. However, the proportion of respondents living rough has increased significantly, which is reflected in the results of the research.

## CHANGE IN PROFILE OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

The summary of the most important changes in the past 20 years (between 1999 and 2020) is based on Peter Gyori's

forementioned study which analyses the results of the 3rd of February research.

### *1. Gender distribution of homeless people*

The proportion of women has increased slowly during from 20 % to 25 %. The number of beds for women and couples has seen continuous growth in parallel with that. Those who live in family hostels are not counted as homeless by the official Hungarian terminology, so they are not included in the survey. The gender breakdown would be different if they were part of the research.

### *2. Age distribution*

The age profile of homeless people has changed. The average age has increased from 46 to 54 in the last 10 years. The proportion of people under 30 has decreased from 10-12% to 4-5% between 1999 and 2020. In contrast the proportion of people over 60 has risen from 11% to 40% while the proportion of those who are between 50-59 is very high too: 31%. This is a serious challenge for homeless services because the provision of adequate support for elderlies requires specialised skills, knowledge and infrastructural conditions. The changes in the age of homeless people are in line with the trend of the general population; the proportion of older generations has increased in the whole population.

### *3. Education*

In the past 20 years the proportion of people with only primary education has doubled (from 5% to 10%). One in two homeless people has completed secondary education, but the number of those who have obtained upper secondary education has decreased (from 19% to 11%), while the proportion of those who have lower secondary education has increased from 31% to 39%.

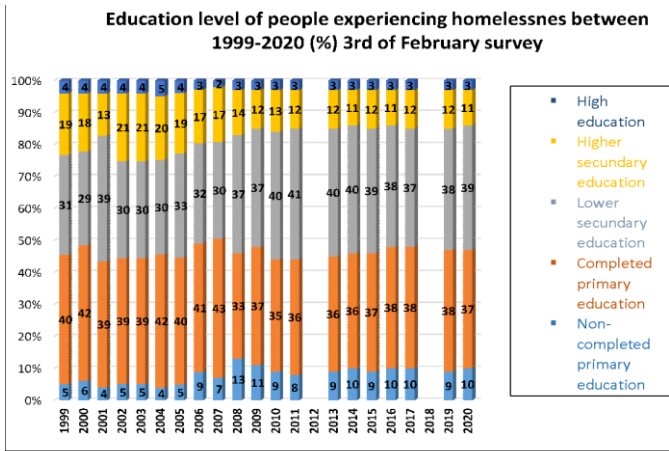
While these indicators have been significantly improving in the whole population, among homeless people they have become worse in this period.

---

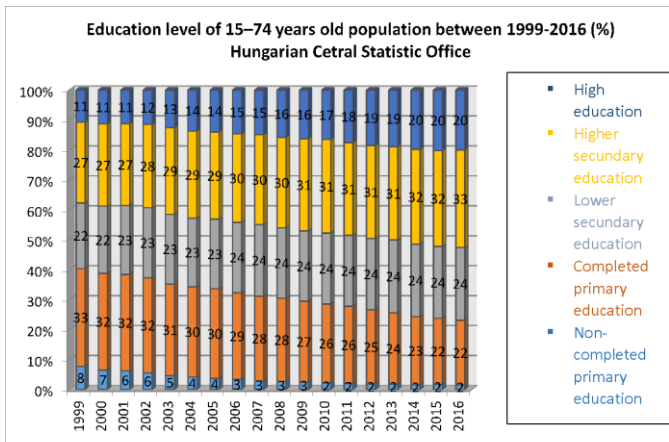
<sup>7</sup> Györi Péter: Idősorok a hazai hajléktalanságról in Társadalmi Riport 2020. 336.o

8

[https://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xstadat/xstadat\\_eves/i\\_z\\_aa007.html](https://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xstadat/xstadat_eves/i_z_aa007.html)



9



#### 4. Homeless people in the labour market

Almost half of homeless people had wage earnings from regular work and many had retirement income. 70-80% of homeless people belonged to one of these two groups. Between 2002 and 2005 the proportion of those earning a wage increased to 59%. As a result of the stagnation of economic growth in Hungary, austerity measures and the global economic crisis, these figures began to deteriorate sharply, and by 2007 the proportion of people earning a living wage had halved. Between 2007 and 2015 only one in three of those who experienced homelessness had a job and this was only slightly improved by the targeted public work programs introduced in 2010. During the following period of economic growth so many employers provided some kind of housing for their employees and because of this - especially from 2016 – many homeless people who were able to work left the accommodation services of the

homeless sector. They were replaced by older people who were not active in the labour market. Nowadays 20% of homeless people live off what they make by begging and a proportion of those who have regular or occasional work dropped back to 32%. Those who have retirement income or disability allowance is 31%.

#### 5. Ethnic background

The main minority group who live in poverty in Hungary is the Roma people. At the beginning of the 3rd of February research, data on ethnicity was not collected because it was generally found that quite a small portion of those surveyed were of a Roma ethnic background. Since 2004 a question relating to ethnicity has been included in the survey: “Have you ever been described as Roma?” The proportion of those who answered yes to this has risen from 19% to 32% since then. That means that the representation of the Roma people in the homeless population is 5 times greater than it is in the whole Hungarian population.

Overall, there was some significant change in the past 20 years in the profile of those experiencing homelessness. In the past, those who experienced homelessness were mostly young and middle-aged people who had lost some element of stability such as employment, regular work and income, a partner, family or housing. Nowadays we find the homeless population is mostly made up of middle-aged and older people with no qualifications, employment, family links or regular housing. The change in the main forms of subsistence (prevalence of begging), the increased proportion of elderly people, poor healthy people, poorly educated people, Roma people, and other demographics show how those who experience homelessness become increasingly excluded from society.

## POLICIES & STRATEGIES

There have been two initiatives aimed at a national homelessness strategy.

The first and more comprehensive strategy proposal was drafted in 2008 but was not approved by the government. However, certain elements of it were implemented by governmental entities. (E.g. those implemented by ESF funding.)

9 •Source of the charts: BMSZKI training material - composed by Péter Breitner, member of 3rd of February Research Team

The second strategic document was drafted in 2015. It defined the most vulnerable groups of homeless people and suggested solutions to their problems. Some of the recommendations of the strategic paper have been incorporated in the relevant legislation regulating homeless service provision.

Act CLXXXIX of 2011 regarding Hungary's local governments sets out those public functions which must be provided by local governments. One of these functions is to provide services and rehabilitation to those affected by homelessness, as well as preventing homelessness. While the Act sets out these requirements, neither it nor any other legislation advises local governments as to how they should fulfil these requirements in a measurable way.

Act III of 1993 concerning social administration and social services defines which type of social service should be provided for homeless people and the capacity of such services. As a consequence of this legislation, local authorities are only obliged to maintain "housing" services (night shelters and temporary hostels) where the number of inhabitants is at least 30,000. This pertains to only 55 out of the 3,178 local governments. It means that 60% of the total population live in a region where the local government doesn't have to provide any housing services for homeless people, in spite of Act CLXXXIX of 2011 clearly sets out the responsibility of the local government to take care of homeless people as described above.

Furthermore, housing services for homeless people are organised mainly in large institutions. A lack of financing often results in service providers being forced to run night shelters and/or temporary hostels where overcrowding is an issue. Additionally, local governments are not encouraged in any way to provide Housing First solutions for homeless people. If we take a closer look at the number of flats owned by local authorities it is clear that the capacity for Housing First programmes becomes less and less each year. (On the diagram the vertical axis on the left shows the total number of dwellings owned by municipalities while the numbers concerning the newly built dwellings are on the right.)

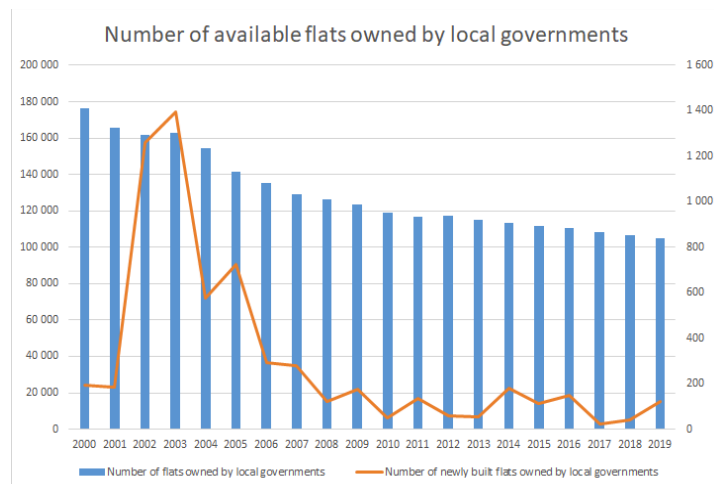


Chart 3. Number of available flats owned by local governments. Source: Hungarian Central Statistical Office

As there are no private solutions for social housing in Hungary, these flats are the only opportunity for someone in a housing crisis to be accommodated, including homeless people. While the number of homeless people is decreasing continuously, the number of newly built flats is extremely low.

## REMARKS ON KEY POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

### Positive

ESF funding has been made available for projects providing Housing First. There are 14 projects offering Housing First services for about a couple of hundred homeless people. However, the project span is a maximum of 36 months, thus any initiative has to find independent funding afterwards to sustain results and support people in their housing in the long term.

### Negative

The criminalisation of homelessness in Hungary has recently reached its climax after the amendment of the Hungarian constitution. According to the bill from 15 October homeless people residing in public spaces can easily end up in jail. After the third warning for residing in public places, homeless people will be offered public benefit work or will be imprisoned.

Normative state funding for homeless services has remained unchanged for many years for shelters and hostels, or has even been reduced e.g. that of day centers.

There is still no progress on the horizon in terms of increasing the affordable proportion of social housing within the housing stock. Housing continues to be defined as a personal problem, with no official support. Local authorities can offer a housing subsidy, which normally does not exceed 10 euros/month.

## REFERENCES

\_ “Büntető törvény után – világvárvány előtt” - Report about the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February research in 2020- composed by Győri Péter

\_ Annual report about housing issues in Hungary 2020 – Habitat for Humanity <https://habitat.hu/sites/lakhatasi-jelentes-2020/>

\_ Győri Péter: Idősorok a hazai hajléktalanságról, In: Társadalmi riport 2020, Szerk: Kolosi Tamás–Szelényi Iván–Tóth István György, TÁRKI, Budapest 2020. <https://tarki.hu/tarsadalmi-riport>

\_ BMSZKI training material - composed by Péter Breitner member of the 3rd of February Research Team.

