

Hungarian

Helsinki

Committee

annual

report

YOUR RIGHTS IS  
OUR MISSION

2019



# Hungarian Helsinki Committee's 2019 annual report

## Dear readers and friends,

The Hungarian Helsinki Committee is a non-governmental human rights organisation which defends human dignity using the law and public attention.

But what does being a human rights organisation really mean?

People often feel that they are unprotected against the power of the state. Some among us more vulnerable than others, like those with disabilities, Roma people, foreigners, refugees fleeing war or torture, detainees, homeless people, women and children. These groups more often face marginalisation, and are less able to represent their own interests if they are in harm's way. If we stand up for them today, we're also standing up for those who could face retaliation tomorrow.

For three decades, we have worked to assist these communities and fellow human beings using the rule of law and the power of publicity, and to balance the dominant power of the state over the individual. While many may believe that this is irrelevant for them, we nonetheless carry out our mission to serve the public interest. With accountability and dedication, we work for the freedom of all people, because the integrity of the law represents the security of our lives.

Since our foundation, we have grown from an organisation of only a few members to now more than 30 lawyers, economists, sociologists, communications experts and journalists. In the beginning, we primarily provided free legal advice and representation. Now, our field of action has grown to include several multi-layered areas of human rights work such as research, professional training, strategic litigation, international legal representation, and awareness-raising media campaigns.

We are proud that the Hungarian Helsinki Committee has become one of Hungary's leading human rights groups and has gained recognition on the international level. Our human rights advocacy is based in Hungary, but the scope of our efforts extends across Europe.

In this annual report, we have gathered our most important achievements from 2019, the abundant fruits of a single year with roots that go back three decades.



**Márta Pardavi**  
HHC co-chair



# Your Rights is Our Mission

## We defend

human dignity using the law and public awareness.

## We strive

to ensure that Hungary treats detained asylum-seekers with humanity and fairness.

## We protect

the rule of law and independent civil society.

## We advocate

for humane detention conditions, and for fair asylum procedures in Hungary.

## We translate

official legal jargon so that even those without a law degree can understand their rights.

## We train

lawyers, administrative professionals, judges, university professors and students in Hungary and abroad.

## We work together

with our NGO allies, Hungarian and international organisations, and all state and non-state actors that value human rights.

## We represent

the principles of the rule of law and European values in Hungary and abroad.

## We strengthen

social solidarity, civic courage, and individual and social responsibility.

## We protect

civic controls on power and the system of checks and balances so that no person's rights can be violated.

## We believe

in a just world where the human rights of all people are respected.

## Why Helsinki ?

The Hungarian Helsinki Committee is a Hungarian public benefit organisation. We almost exclusively deal with Hungarian issues, with the human rights violations committed by Hungarian authorities. So, why 'Helsinki'? Helsinki is the trademark of human rights and a respected human rights movement. The governments of Europe and North America signed the Helsinki Final Act on 1 August 1975, in which they committed themselves to respect fundamental human rights. As a result, self-organising groups in the countries of the communist block, referring to the Final Act in their names, began demanding that their states respect the rights laid out in Helsinki. The Hungarian group was founded in 1989 to monitor the fairness of the first free elections.



## Who is that mysterious woman with her fingers raised in our logo ?

The woman originally appeared on a woodcut by the famous art nouveau illustrator Aubrey Beardsley (1872-1898), which he created for the 1893 publication of Thomas Malory's medieval history volume Le Morte d'Arthur. More than 20 years ago, the great book designer József Pintér proposed that the image be a part of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee insignia. The stern female face and cautionary hand expresses the mission of our organisation: to vigilantly uphold fundamental rights and use the law and public awareness to oppose unlawful acts by the powerful.



# Awards

## Our work has received outstanding international recognition

"The Hungarian Helsinki Committee makes me sleep better at night here in Norway, because they work for a safer world with their strong fight for democracy and human rights in Hungary."

Jonas Gahr Støre, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Norway at the award ceremony of the Andrei Sakharov Freedom Award 2019

"Márta Pardavi is leading the Hungarian Helsinki Committee's work in the field of refugee protection, and with dignity and professionalism, confronts those who attempt to systematically dismantle civil society and normalise xenophobia and hate crimes. For her dedication and exceptional contribution to resist inhumane treatment of the most vulnerable, Márta is awarded the Civil Rights Defender of the Year 2019", said the Board of Civil Rights Defenders in its motivation.



**POLITICO 28 Class 2019**  
28 people shaping and stirring Europe in 2019  
Márta Pardavi, HHC co-chair



**Civil Rights Defender**  
of the Year 2019, Sweden  
Márta Pardavi, HHC co-chair

**Andrei Sakharov Freedom Award 2019** Norway  
The Hungarian Helsinki Committee



# Our Successes

## Our help continued to make a real change in 2019

We played a leading role in examining the functioning of **European Union ombudspersons**.

We won **90** percent of our cases against unfair asylum decisions after turning to Hungarian courts.

We prevented the deliberate starvation of **19** asylum-seekers detained in transit zones by Hungarian authorities.

We obtained the **release** of **92** illegally detained foreign citizens, including many children, from Hungary's inhuman transit zones.



One of our clients, a Russian dissident facing political persecution, finally received **refugee status** after several years, when we won our eighth case before the Court of Justice of the European Union

We ensured that **19** husbands, wives and children were able to reunite with their spouses or parents who were recognised as refugees in Hungary.

We raised our voice in domestic and international media more than **800** times in defence of human rights and the rule of law.

Our posts were read by **700,000** people, double the readership from last year.



We obtained the public disclosure of regulations affecting everyday life in prisons, which were previously unjustifiably concealed.

We **trained 1,450** state authorities and NGO professionals, judges, university professors and other experts in Europe, Africa and Latin America.



Our work was recognised with **3 outstanding international awards**.

We celebrated our **30th** anniversary.

We were the first in Europe to develop an **online training** course in **10 countries** on plain-language legal information for those involved in criminal proceedings.

# Our Activities

## WE DEFEND THE RULE OF LAW

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**The rule of law** means no one is above the law: a government minister, a police officer or a mayor are all required to follow the same rules as you are. Under the rule of law, even a democratically elected government must abide by certain rules, and judges, ombudspersons and non-governmental organisations defend against the abuse of power. Under the rule of law, you can always find out what the government is doing and why, and if you don't agree, you can freely express your opinion. Under the rule of law, people live in security, knowing exactly what the state expects from them and what they can expect from the state.

## WE WORK FOR A FAIR CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

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Throughout your life, you may often get in contact with the police or even with courts. A police officer can check your identity in the street, and can fine you for speeding or for not having a bell on your bicycle. You can also get in contact with the police as a **victim** of a crime, such as if you have been attacked because of your skin colour, your religion, your ethnicity, or your political convictions, or because someone simply didn't like who you were holding hands with in the street. In such a situation, it is your right to have the authorities explain your rights and what is happening to you in an easy-to-understand way. **You have a right** to legal representation, and to fair treatment by the police when they take your statement.

## WE ASSIST REFUGEES FLEEING WAR AND PERSECUTION

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From Afghanistan through Syria to Somalia, armed conflicts are raging across the world. **Torture, slavery and abuse** are rampant, often directed at those whose religion, lifestyle or political opinions are contrary to the expectations of those in power. Sometimes, it is a matter of being at the wrong place at the wrong time: bombings and wartime massacres take their victims indiscriminately. Safe and prosperous countries can fall into chaos and misery in only a couple of years, victimising millions.

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**Where there is no rule of law**, those who dare to criticise the government can be fired from their job or face punishment, abuse, or even prison. Where there is no rule of law, a doctor cannot openly point out that the walls of her hospital are crumbling, or that there are not enough bandages or nurses. Without the rule of law, corruption runs rampant, and those with ties to the powerful are placed in well-paid positions instead of talented, qualified people. Where there is no rule of law, police, judges and journalists act on the political orders of the government rather than based on their own professional and moral compass. Where there is no rule of law, workers and the poor live at the mercy of the powerful. Where there is no rule of law, fear and uncertainty reign, and there is no one to protect those who are in trouble or suffering injustice. A country where the rule of law is upheld is a better country, but in Hungary, it has been drastically eroded since 2010. A recent poll shows that half of Hungarians do not believe that their country is a democracy. We are working every day to defend the rule of law, and this work is now more important than ever.

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Prison conditions reveal a lot about a society. In a democratic European country, a person must never be tortured or held in inhuman conditions, whatever crime they may have committed. Hundreds of people are currently detained in Hungarian prisons for simple petty offences, like being unable to pay a fine. Many people must spend months in detention before it turns out that they did not commit any crime. In the past decade, Hungarian prisons have become gravely overcrowded. Cells were often so crowded that only one person at a time could stand up from their bed. One of the stated goals of incarceration is deterrence and crime prevention, but it is equally important to ensure that those being released from prison are able to reintegrate into society by finding a job and dignified subsistence. However, years spent in overcrowded and depressing prison conditions often produce the opposite effect. This is why we have worked for decades to ensure fair, rule-abiding law enforcement, **fair criminal proceedings and humane prison conditions.**

We believe that there is no justification for the killing, torture or humiliation of anyone, and that no person should be abused or imprisoned for standing up for democracy, for reporting on the truth as a journalist, for being Christian, Muslim or non-religious, for being born gay or transgender, for being conservative, liberal or a social democrat, for refusing to be sent to certain death as a soldier, or for being a woman who chooses to live on her own terms rather than according to oppressive rules forced upon her. This is why **we help** those who did not have the fortune to be born in free and peaceful places, but were forced to flee their homes **protect their own lives and human dignity.**



## What have we done to protect the rule of law in Hungary?

- In 2019, we provided **free legal assistance** to those who bravely stood up for their rights or the rights of others, even if it came at great personal risk.
- In February, a final court ruling declared that lawyer Boglárka Szert was **unlawfully dismissed from her job** at the state-financed Antall József Knowledge Centre because she objected to a decision by the foundation's chairman that her colleagues could not openly oppose plans to host the olympic games in Budapest. The court ordered the Centre to pay Szert one year's salary as compensation.

"I am glad to know that there is an organisation I can count on if my humanity were one day trampled upon."  
a personal letter from one of our supporters



- For years, the Fidesz leadership of Budapest's Eighth District used official harassment and various legal proceedings to make the operation of the **Auróra Community Centre** impossible, which provides a home to numerous independent, government-critical civic organisations and initiatives. In the summer of 2019, officials decided to close Auróra, which was only informed of the decision after the closure deadline, when they could no longer challenge it at court. The HHC helped to find a legal solution to keep Auróra open, and in October 2019, the newly-elected district government revoked the decision, allowing Auróra to continue operating.

- A first-degree ruling was reached in 2019 concerning the weekly magazine Figyelő. Following elections in 2018, the magazine published a list of university professors, researchers and NGO employees, labelling them "Soros mercenaries". Two of those listed stood up for their rights and took the case to court, where they were represented by the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (HCLU) and the HHC. The court ruled that **press freedom does not extend to stigmatisation with false statements**, and ordered damages to be paid to our two clients and required the magazine to publish the court's decision.

"We will continue our activities and obviously anticipate any legal or other risks that come as a result. But it's fantastic that Helsinki can provide legal help in these cases."  
Zsuzsa Mekler, a leader at the Auróra Community Centre



- A registered nurse and mother of five children was forced to leave her job at the **Military Hospital State Health Centre** (Honvédkórház) because of a new law stating that she could only continue working **an employee of the army**. This would mean **losing many important rights** such as the right to protest, and she would have to notify her boss if she travelled abroad. Despite doing exemplary work for more than a decade at the hospital, our client was not paid a severance, until a first-degree court decision in November 2019, where the HHC provided legal representation, obliged the hospital to do so.
- We made major contributions to keeping the spotlight **international attention on Hungary** so that the government's steps against the rule of law did not go unnoticed and unanswered. In many cases, various agencies of the European Union, the United Nations and the Council of Europe relied on and referred to our reports, echoing our criticism.

- We alerted EU institutions, the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers as well as others about government plans to create **a new, heavily government-controlled administrative court system**.

The planned system would have opened the door for government interference with the independence of judges in delicate matters such as **public procurement, elections and even protests**. We clearly explained and analysed the complex legal situation and its risks, and contributed to international criticism which led to the government completely giving up on its plans for the administrative court system.

"I want to personally thank them for the devoted work they do not just for my son, but for the entire country and for young people with disabilities. It's an uplifting feeling to be a tiny part of this process."  
the mother of one of our clients

- In a so-called "Article 7 procedure", the institutions of the European Union determine whether a decision by a Member State is a clear breach of fundamental EU values such as the rule of law. Along with seven other NGOs, we presented an English-language clarification report on Article 7 proceedings against Hungary, refuting, point by point, the government's misleading, inaccurate arguments in response to the Sargentini report which sparked the investigation. The clarification addressed the **election system, judicial independence, corruption, press freedom, higher education, LGBTQI rights, gender equality, and the environment for civil society and asylum-seekers**. It was also important that as many Hungarians as possible get access to the information, so we held joint public discussions with NGO partners in Budapest and other cities across the country.

- We rallied **35 civic groups, two former ombudspersons** and over **2,300 individuals** to get behind a petition asking Hungarian president János Áder to choose a candidate for Commissioner for Fundamental Rights (ombudsperson) in a transparent way and in consultation with civil society, so that the new Commissioner would truly be "everyone's ombudsperson". President Áder, unfortunately, did not comply with this request, but the **issue of the independence and nominating process** of ombudspersons was placed in the public eye. Additionally, we performed an analysis of the previous ombudsperson's activities between 2014 and 2019, in which we showed that the commissioner did not fulfill his task of examining important legal violations in many politically sensitive cases. An international committee released a "quality control" report on the ombudsperson in 2019, agreeing with many of our concerns and criticising the ombudsperson's nominating process and his failure to address important human rights issues. The committee decided that another examination must be conducted of the new ombudsperson in October 2020 to ensure his activities comply with international standards.

- The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruled in 2016 that András Baka, then president of Hungary's highest court the Kúria, had been dismissed from his post for openly criticising the government. The ECtHR's decision meant that the Hungarian government must take steps to ensure that **judges do not fear retaliation for expressing their professional opinions**. In a submission to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, we showed that the Court's ruling had not been implemented. Several Hungarian judges have suffered negative consequences for expressing opinions on judicial independence. A September 2019 decision by the Committee of Ministers, which investigates whether ECtHR decisions are implemented, echoed our submission in expressing its concerns that freedom of expression for judges had not only not improved, but had in fact deteriorated, particularly since 2016. The Committee ordered the Hungarian government to take steps to improve the situation.

"I've worked at the Hungarian Helsinki Committee for 18 years because no matter which way the political winds are blowing, protecting our clients and human rights to the best of our abilities is all that matters."



Tamás Fazekas,  
HHC staff attorney

# Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice

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## What have we done for a fair criminal justice system?

- We have continued **litigating systematic prison overcrowding** at the European Court of Human Rights, thus contributing to the reduction of it.
- We were the first in Europe to develop an **online training** module on the usage of plain language for criminal justice stakeholders. The module is available in ten European countries aiming at the enhancement of accessible communication in criminal procedures all over the region.
- In **juvenile criminal cases**, the state must act with particular care and only sentence children to detention as a last resort. Our client “Sándor”, who had no criminal record and suffered from mild mental disability, was not even 15 years old when he was detained. Although he immediately admitted to his crime, he spent 22 months in pre-trial detention, and then another six months under house arrest. With our help, Sándor won his case at the European Court of Human Rights. The state acknowledged the rights violation, and our client received compensation.
- The HHC-led **Petty Offence Working Group** redesigned the **“on-the-spot fine” template** often used by the police in petty offence cases. The new, accessible template was written in plain language, and it is available online in Hungarian and English. We created sample application forms for petty offenders to request a hearing by the authorities; to pay the fine in instalments; a reduction of the fine based on an assessment of personal financial circumstances. As part of our efforts to support underprivileged groups of society, the Working Group made these sample application forms available online to help offenders who cannot afford to hire professional legal assistance access helpful information.

- We authored a **handbook for lawyers** to help defence counsels provide their clients with effective legal assistance already at the beginning of criminal proceedings -, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- We **trained lawyers** both in and outside Budapest on pre-trial detention practices.
- Along with other organisations, we developed a list of recommendations for ombudspersons on what they can do to ensure that the **rights of suspects** are respected.
- We examined pre-trial detention practices and the assignment of **ex officio defence counsels** and shared our experiences with the legislators.
- We provided **legal advice and representation** in **1,242** court cases.

- Our achievement as a member of the **Working Group against Hate Crimes** was that the police modified its crime registration practice to make it more suitable for combating hate crimes, which makes it easier for investigators to identify them.
- **Together with the University of Minnesota**, we began developing new methods and curricula for **human rights education**.
- We provided training on police practices to mentors of the BAGázs Public Benefit Association - a Hungarian NGO providing inclusive care, social and educational support for Roma people -, and gave **legal assistance** in individual cases. We also prepared **easy-to-understand information leaflets** on how to ask for police assistance.
- Through litigation, we achieved the court-ordered release of the special “standing orders” of the **Hungarian Prison Service**, which determine how penitentiaries operate on a daily basis. We will continue litigating for full public access to crucial public-interest information concerning incarceration.
- We provided legal assistance to participants in a series of protests over amendments to the Hungarian Labour Code and gave them information on the right to **freedom of assembly** and related police measures.
- We informed international public opinion on changes to Hungarian laws and practices, including on **discrimination** against Roma and refugees, on the rights of **children**, and on **detention** conditions.

- While Hungarian law stipulates that a person may only be deprived of their freedom if they are present in court, our client “László” was unable to take part in the proceedings over his pre-trial detention as it was ordered without him or his lawyer being present. Our client unsuccessfully sought redress in Hungary over the improper proceedings, and with our help turned to the European Court of Human Rights. **The state recognised the violation of the rights**, and while our client was entitled to receive compensation, he died in prison.
- We assisted a man whom the police had forced into confessing to stealing wood, a crime it was later shown he did not commit. Despite a significant quantity of convincing evidence, the later **investigation against the police** was suspended in Hungary. Our client finally **won his lawsuit at the ECtHR**.

“It’s a great feeling to help others, and I’m very glad that I have the opportunity to do so in a workplace which provides me with complete intellectual and professional freedom.”

Dóra Tarnai,  
legal officer with  
the Human Rights  
Counselling Office

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# Asylum and Refugees

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## What have we done to protect those fleeing war and persecution?



- For more than 20 years, the HHC has been the only Hungarian partner of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to provide **free legal assistance** to those seeking asylum in Hungary.
- In 2019, lawyers with our Refugee Programme provided free legal assistance to **864 people**, and represented many of them before the asylum authority or Hungarian and international courts. **190** of them were **women**, **351** of them were **children**. Most of our clients arrived after a life-threatening journey lasting months from regions struck by war and terror, like Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Somalia.
- We assisted three-quarters of our clients in an **asylum procedure**, to help them obtain the protection they are entitled to under Hungarian and EU law. Although the government, since 2015, has increasingly obstructed access to international protection by deliberately destroying the Hungarian asylum system, we managed to help **22 clients** in 2019 to obtain refugee status, subsidiary protection or tolerated stay, thus giving them hope for a new life in safety in Hungary.
- We continued to fight against unlawful rejection decisions by asylum authorities, and took as many cases as possible before Hungarian courts where **90% (!) of our cases** ended with the court agreeing with our arguments and declaring that our clients should have been **granted protection**. In the most blatant cases, we had to turn to the European Court of Human Rights, where in 2019 we were able to prevent Hungarian authorities from returning to Afghanistan a single Afghan mother and her child, who suffered from heart disease, which could have amounted to their death sentence.

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- We provide legal representation in more cases before the EU Court of Justice than any other European human rights organisation. This court examines whether a Member State's laws are in line with EU rules. If they are not, the court orders changes to the problematic laws or practices. In 2019, we achieved another victory at this court, with an impact across Europe. In the Torubarov case, the court ruled that the practices of the Hungarian asylum authority were unlawful, and that that **courts** anywhere in the EU **have the right to grant refugee status** (under certain conditions), a **victory** both for the HHC and **for the rule of law**.
- We turned to the ECtHR against the deliberate **starvation**, by Hungarian authorities, of **19 asylum-seekers** who were detained in **transit zones**. This is a form of torture which has no precedent in any democratic European country.
- We turned to the ECtHR in six other cases in order to free, at the very least, the most vulnerable **families with children** from the transit zones, which are under constant surveillance and enclosed with barbed wire and uniformed guards. We were successful in one case.
- Since 2015, the deliberate dismantling of the Hungarian asylum system and constant hate propaganda from the government has led to the increasingly inhuman treatment of asylum-seekers. We **reported all of these abuses in "real time"**, often alone, to the EU, the UN, and other international organisations and media outlets.

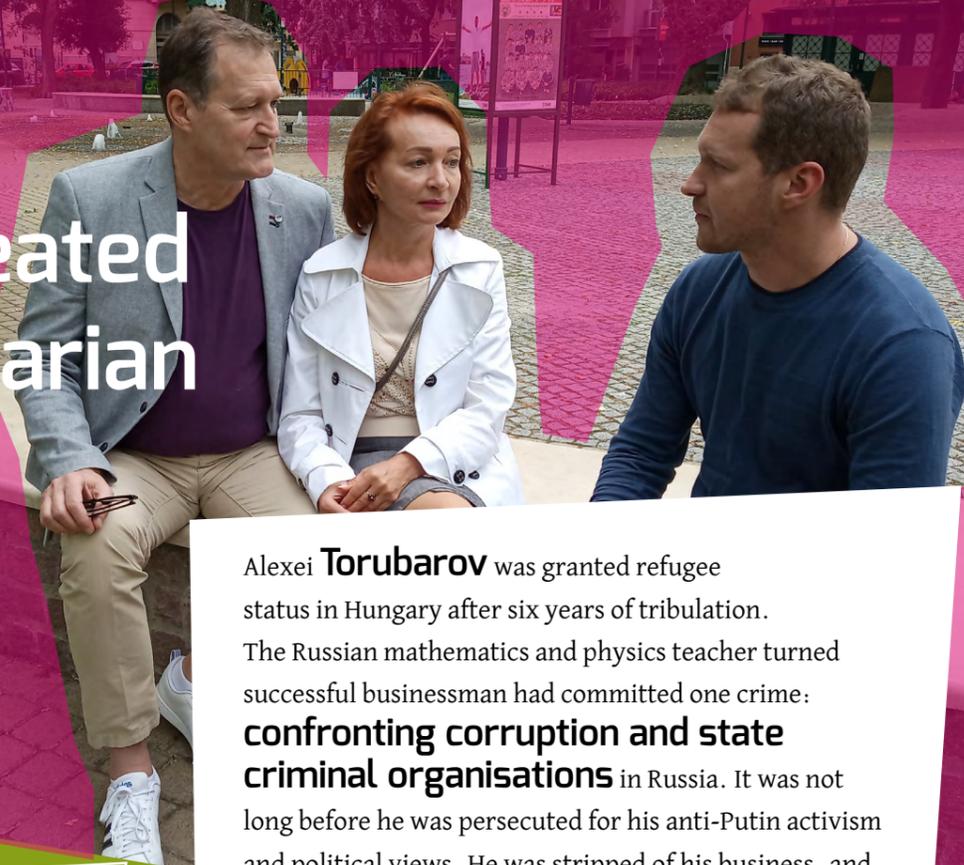
- We assisted other refugee clients primarily by helping **reunite** them **with their families**. Many of their spouses and children remained in life-threatening conditions in their home countries, while other families were separated on their long journey to Europe, with family members getting stuck in overcrowded refugee camps on the margins of warzones. Our lawyers helped these family members to safely and legally travel to Hungary, where they could begin their new lives together. With our help, **19 people** were reunited with their families last year.

"I became a lawyer so that I could devote my legal knowledge to the effective protection of the most vulnerable."



Zsolt Szekeres,  
lawyer with our  
Refugee Programme

# The man who defeated the Hungarian asylum system



Alexei **Torubarov** was granted refugee status in Hungary after six years of tribulation. The Russian mathematics and physics teacher turned successful businessman had committed one crime: **confronting corruption and state criminal organisations** in Russia. It was not long before he was persecuted for his anti-Putin activism and political views. He was stripped of his business, and the state used the mafia to “investigate” him, forcing him to flee his country. A sniper attempted to kill him in Austria, and the Czech Republic unlawfully deported him back to Russia. In 2013, he came to Hungary where he sought asylum, but he became a toy in a ping pong game between the courts and asylum authorities. With help from the HHC, he **won** a lawsuit first at the EU Court of Justice, and then at the Public Administration and Labour Court in Pécs, after which he was finally granted refugee status. He has, since then, begun building a new life with his family in Europe. His victory is both a **triumph of courageous resistance and of human dignity**, which gives hope to other persecuted people.

“I just wanted to thank you for all the hard work you are doing day by day, trying to fight for human rights and human dignity. I really hope to work in the same field some day!”

Valentina, Italian student from Turin



His life in danger in his home country, Mohammed had to flee, and his wife Rana and their four young children could not join him. Mohammed requested asylum in Hungary, and after a long procedure, was recognised as a refugee. After he received refugee status, he immediately began **family reunification** proceedings. Mohammed and Rana wanted their children to come legally and safely to Hungary to join their father, and the three years they spent apart were very difficult for the family. The procedure was successful, and in 2019, the family was finally reunited, and they now live together in safety in Hungary. The HHC provided the family with **free legal representation** both during the asylum procedure and the family reunification process, which together lasted for two and a half years.

“They fight in every arena to represent the values that are important to me: they struggle for justice and for the rights and lives of minorities, castaways, the persecuted, the disadvantaged, and those standing in the path of the powerful.”

Eszter, one of our supporters from Nyíregyháza, Northwest Hungary

# Together again - after years apart

“The Hungarian Helsinki Committee is the crown jewel of our organisation.”

Gerald Staberock, Secretary General of the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), on the occasion of the HHC joining the network in 2019

“Human rights belong to all of us. Here I have the chance to act against injustice.”



Magda Major, lawyer with our Refugee Programme

## Training and awareness-raising

Defending human rights cannot take place only in courtrooms. In a just and fair society, it is important that all people be familiar with their rights. Decision-makers must be aware of their obligation to uphold human rights, and we must nurture people who can pass on this knowledge to new generations of professionals who will defend us all. This is why the HHC has been involved in human rights training and awareness-raising for many years. In 2019, we provided training and gave lectures to **1,450 professionals from around 50 countries**, a unique achievement in Europe for an NGO of this size. Participants in these events included lawyers, NGO staff, state officials, judges, professors and United Nations employees. We also held numerous lectures in Hungary for attorneys and other lawyers on important questions regarding fair criminal proceedings.

These lectures dealt with, for example,

- **how to use plain language to explain to witnesses or suspects what their rights are;**
- **in what cases it is prohibited for the police to use handcuffs;**
- **why it is important to make video recordings of interrogations;**
- **what the right to legal defence means in practice.**

In our training activities in Hungary, we continued to focus on cases before the ECtHR, and on the rights of ill-treated detainees. Under our leadership, a pioneering online training material is being prepared in ten European countries on the use of plain language in criminal procedures that will be available for free to thousands of professionals.



Also in 2019, professionals from four continents took an interest in our expertise. Most of our trainings abroad dealt with topics on which the HHC is one of the world's leading experts, such as credibility assessment in **asylum procedures**, human rights issues related to **statelessness**, documenting **violence by authorities**, provision of plain-language information in **criminal proceedings**, and methods of **human rights education**. Our colleagues were invited to give presentations at a pan-European training session for judges; to several courses at the world-famous International Institute of Humanitarian Law in Sanremo, Italy; and to a training in the Ivory Coast for authorities from West African countries. We gave lectures in English and Hungarian, as well as in French, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese.



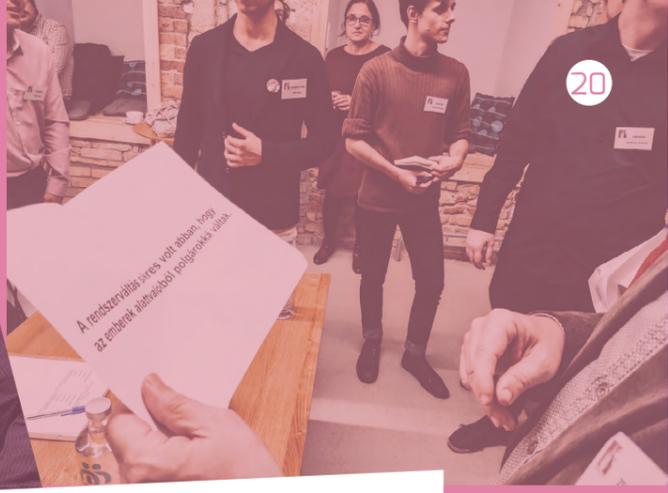
Our unique **“Refugee Law Reader”** project continued last year, in cooperation with the United Nations High Commission on Refugees, to make **refugee law education at universities around the world**. Thanks to our initiative, some 40 university professors began teaching asylum law in Latin America, North Africa and Eastern Europe in the last five years. In Santiago de Chile, we brought together a Latin American community of educators represented by people from Mexico to Brazil who are now playing a crucial role in the refugee crisis originating in Venezuela, the most severe in the region's history. We also began spreading our successful model in Southern Africa. In 2019, we held a preparatory workshop in Pretoria for university professors from the host country of South Africa, as well as from Angola, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Botswana.

In addition to training professionals, we consider it very important to help vulnerable groups in Hungary to better understand their rights. Our goal is for them to recognise when they have been the victims of **discrimination**, hate speech or hate crimes; for them to **defend their rights** as effectively as possible in such situations; and to know when and

how to turn to the police for help. To that end, we worked together with the BAGázs Association, which works with a local Roma community in the village of Bag in northern Hungary, and held human rights empowerment sessions for Muslim women and men in Budapest with support from the Embassy of the Netherlands.

# Everyday Heroes

## Our Events



In addition to trainings, public events are another important arena for sharing our knowledge and experience. These provide us with the opportunity to meet and speak directly with our community, and are also a valuable chance for us to hear feedback from our supporters and sympathisers. In 2019, we worked to improve our connections with communities in Budapest and the countryside through our self-organised events. Alongside the generation that is more familiar with our work, we tried to raise the interest of as many families, young people and elderly people as possible through **festivals, debates, a slam poetry club and career day** events. We developed playful interactive programmes, and our **police simulation** and **human rights quiz** became quick hits. Our classic, full-house "Helsinki evenings" were also regularly broadcast on social media platforms. In December, we organised a joint **demonstration** with our civic partners against the criminalisation of homelessness. With these programmes, we were able to reach hundreds of young people in points across Hungary.



## "I wanted to set an example"

In February 2019, Boglárka Szert won a lawsuit against her former employer, the Antall József Knowledge Centre. The court awarded her a year's worth of back pay. Our client had the courage to stand up for her colleagues who had expressed their political opinions on Facebook, as a consequence of which she was fired with immediate effect. She and her lawyer, Balázs Tóth of the HHC, recall the events.

### Why did you decide to file a lawsuit against the Antall József Knowledge Centre?

**Boglárka Szert:** I wanted to demonstrate that we have a right to resist arbitrary decisions. I wanted to show my younger colleagues how to react if a person encounters illegality or a violation of their rights. I was shocked that no one was emboldened when the Knowledge Centre fired almost a dozen people. No one defended themselves against the dismissals, they just put their dismissal papers in their pockets and went away. Unfortunately, my actions didn't have the effect I wanted at the Centre, but they did elsewhere. A lot of people, even ones I didn't know, encouraged or congratulated me, saying I had done what was right by not giving up and bringing the case to court with the help of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee. And I wasn't disappointed. The Helsinki lawyers did excellent work. Without Helsinki's support I probably wouldn't have been able to defend my rights so successfully, even though I myself am a young legal professional with a degree. Helsinki's assistance made it possible to take advantage of high-level, specialised expertise and provided the necessary media attention.



### The Hungarian Helsinki Committee usually provides assistance to victims of human rights violations committed by the state. Why did you make an exception here?

**Balázs Tóth:** This case isn't really an exception. This is about a public foundation which operates predominantly on state funding provided by the government. The head of the foundation, Péter Antall, said at the trial that they've got to be on good terms with the government because they're dependent on it. One of their witnesses said, "In 21st century Hungary, many people face retaliations because they express views contrary to those of the governing party [...] In 21st century Hungary, an employee has got to be careful." We at the Hungarian Helsinki Committee think this is unacceptable, which is why we gladly helped Boglárka, who had the courage to express her opposition. Tyranny is built on human passivity and fear, but it's hard for it to thrive where there is civic courage.



### Were you disappointed that your former colleagues did not follow your example?

**Boglárka Szert:** I rather think of it as a useful lesson. Only one of my colleagues, who left the company when the case erupted, appeared as a witness for me, even though around 50 people worked there. In any case, I don't regret taking it to court because such good things happened to me that I would have missed had I gone ahead and negotiated with them and looked the other way.

# 1989-2019

30  
years

22

## Happy Birthday, Helsinki!

"At the beginning, it was an open question whether there was any sense in the Helsinki Committee continuing to operate after the regime change: there were new democratic institutions, the Parliament, the Constitutional Court, the ombudspersons were elected, there was a free press...But it wasn't long before we understood that there was still a need for human rights organisations."

Ferenc Kőszeg, founding chairman

31,000  
clients

40 successful lawsuits  
at the European Court  
of Human Rights

"We are not attacking the state but defending democracy. Democratic governments should welcome the activities of civil rights defenders rather than fighting against them."

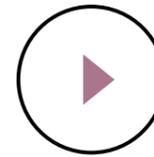
Ádám Fischer, orchestra conductor  
and member of our association

50 books

10 outstanding  
international  
awards

"The Hungarian Helsinki Committee has a fundamental role in securing the accountability of the state and also in providing immediate assistance to victims. At the same time, they are an indispensable source of information for their partners and international organisations."

Nils Muižnieks, former Council  
of Europe Commissioner for Human  
Rights



23

we released 77 prison  
monitoring reports  
in almost 10 years

we visited police  
detention centres  
more than 1,000 times

9 October 1989

first officially registered by a court

1996

1994

our permanent human  
rights office is  
established

1995

we released our first  
fact-finding report  
on the immigration  
detention facility in Kistarcsa

1998

we became an  
implementing partner  
of the United Nations  
High Commission for Refugees

2003

we won  
our first lawsuit  
at the European Court  
of Human Rights

2004

the Refugee Law Reader, our one-of-a-kind  
model curriculum, was established

2006

we provided  
legal representation  
for victims of police  
violence

2010

we began our work for the preservation  
of the rule of law

2013

our blind clients won the first  
case in the history of the United  
Nations Committee on the Rights of  
Persons With Disabilities

2015

the ECtHR declared that  
overcrowding in prisons  
must be reduced following a  
complaint by our client

2016

we successfully  
campaign to invalidate  
the anti-refugee referendum

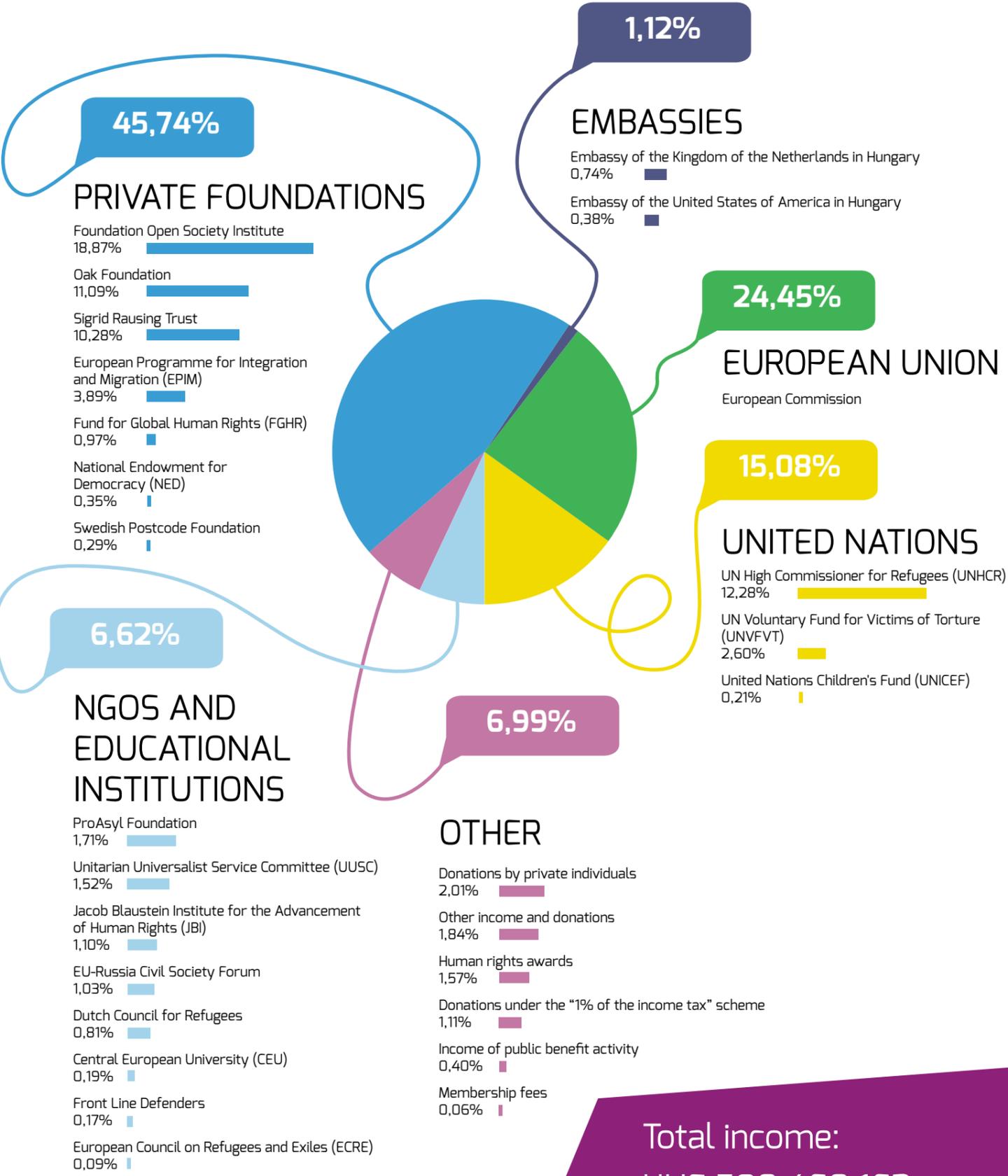
2018

we successfully  
challenged the  
starvation  
of detainees in  
transit zones by the  
Hungarian state

2019

we celebrated  
30 years of service  
protecting human rights  
and vulnerable people

## Income



We are committed at the HHC to keeping our finances transparent. Our past financial reports and public benefit reports are freely available on our website. In 2019, the HHC continued to sustain its operations and programmes through grants and private donations.

By lending us your support, you too can help us assist those who are in harm's way.

HUNGARIAN TAX IDENTIFICATION NUMBER: 19013983-1-42

ACCOUNT HOLDER'S NAME: Hungarian Helsinki Committee

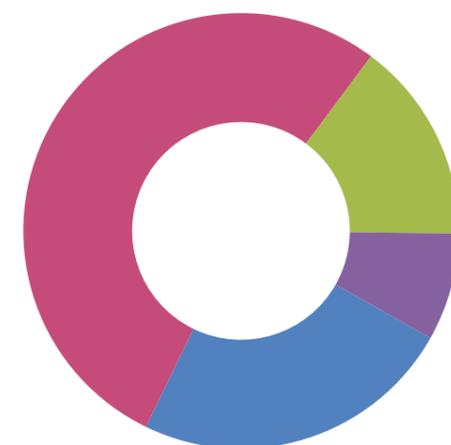
IBAN NUMBER: HU75 1020 1006 5024 7961 0000 0000

BANK NAME AND ADDRESS: Kereskedelmi és Hitelbank Zrt.,  
H-1095, Budapest, Lechner Ödön fasor 9.

SWIFT: OKHBHUHB

"You have my 1% tax donation every year, and my appreciation as well."  
Zsolt, one of our private donors

## Expenses



Total income:  
HUF 508 468 162

Total expenses:  
HUF 482 079 500

# Thank you!

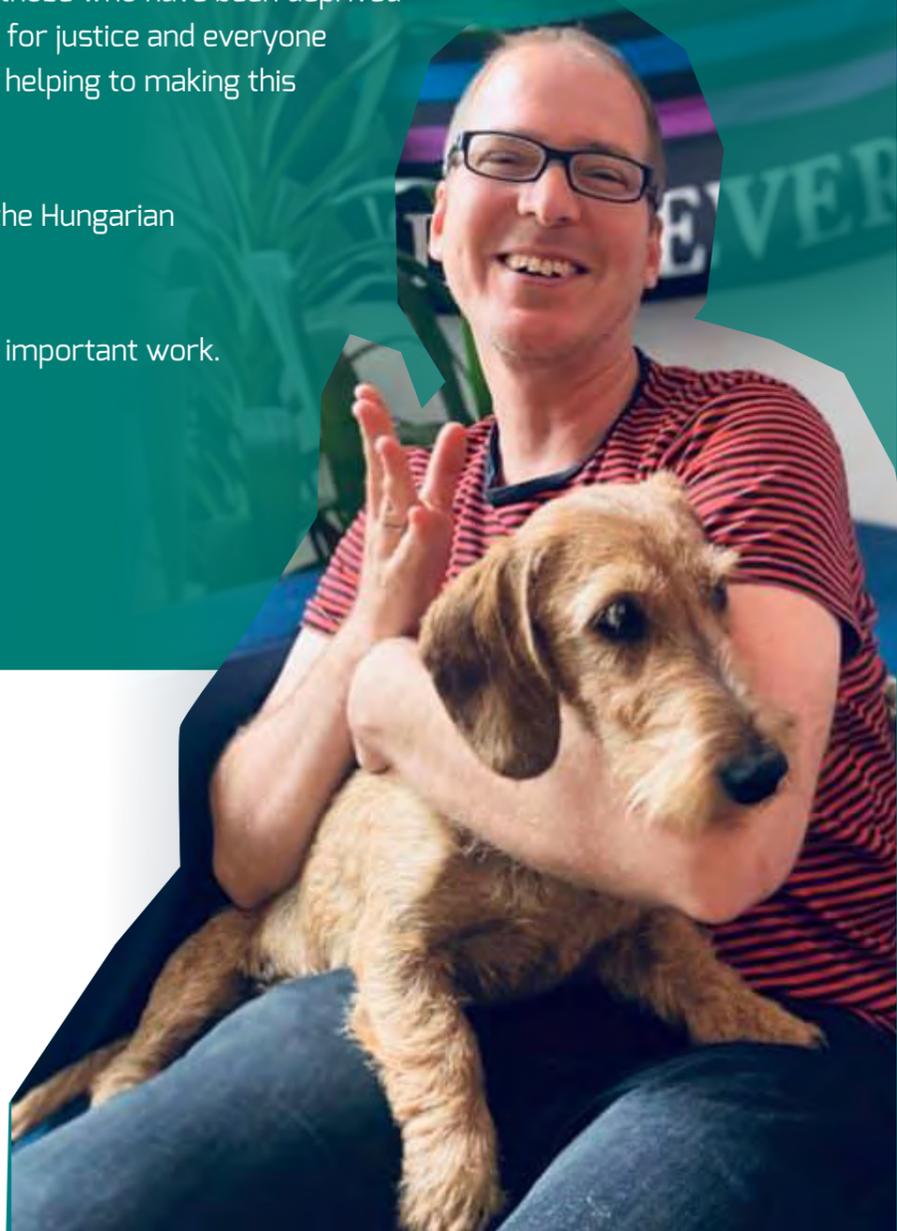
At the Hungarian Helsinki Committee, we believe that nothing can be accomplished alone. It is reassuring to know that many people share our commitment to the values that we fight for. Our old and new clients, our partners in Hungary and abroad, our sympathisers and those we don't know yet all strengthen our conviction that it is essential to stand up for our rights and to raise our voices when we see injustice. It gives us strength to feel people's burgeoning solidarity, and we do our best to add to this using all the tools available to us.

An inestimable part of our work is the contributions that others provide. To them, we want to extend our heartfelt gratitude that we are not alone in our mission. We also want to thank our volunteers, those giving us their 1% tax donations, our private and institutional donors, our clients, our followers, our NGO friends, our state and non-state partners, as well as those who have been deprived of their rights but bravely stand up for justice and everyone who helps them along the way, for helping to making this world a more just place.

This is what we are fighting for at the Hungarian Helsinki Committee.

Thank you for supporting us in this important work.

**András Kristóf Kádár**  
co-chair



HUNGARIAN HELSINKI COMMITTEE

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