

MÁGYAR

**ANNUAL
REPORT
2020**

HELSINKI



**HUNGARIAN
HELSINKI
COMMITTEE**

BIZOTTSÁG!



DEAR FRIENDS!

2020 was an unusual year for all of us. The COVID-19 pandemic has been, and continues to be a test for the whole world, for Europe and for Hungarian society. We have not faced such a challenge for a long time. In such a situation, the responsibilities and tasks of organisations dealing with civil liberties are multiplied. Measures taken to combat the pandemic can lead to unjustified, disproportionate restrictions of our fundamental rights; even if there is no bad intent behind them. If, on the other hand, the government uses the pandemic as an excuse to further expand its own power; if it takes action without consulting its stakeholders and completely ignoring their views; and if violations become particularly frequent and serious; human rights organisations will have to respond by redoubling their efforts.

The pandemic, like any crisis, is a trial of resilience, of courage, but most of all, of solidarity. To stand the test of this, to overcome the devastating effects of COVID-19, we need to come together as a real community and look to the welfare of the most vulnerable. To this end, the Hungarian Helsinki Committee has tried to strengthen solidarity in an increasingly divided Hungarian society by using new methods and addressing new topics:

- we provided accessible legal information to the public about changes in pandemic rules;
- we gave legal advice and legal representation to members of groups who were not previously our clients; such as doctors and other healthcare professionals, patients prematurely discharged from hospitals and their relatives, and people who have been unfairly fined under pandemic rules; and
- we supported health workers and students who were excluded from online education due to a lack of appropriate equipment with monetary and material donations.

In addition, we did not give up working on our core issues; and we achieved significant results in 2020 in these as well. After nearly five years of litigation, we successfully put an end to the arbitrary detention of asylum seekers in transit zones. Following a ruling by the European Court of Justice, almost 300 people (half of them children) were released from the transit zones after months or even years of detention. Through our strategic lawsuits, research and reports, we contributed greatly to the fact that, for the first time in many decades, there have been no more detainees in Hungarian prisons than can be legally placed. We continued our fight for the rule of law by informing the domestic and international public, and advocating for our brave fellow citizens who stand up for their own rights and those of others in the 'illiberal system'. For example, we helped an activist from Gyula who was taken by police for questioning at dawn because he criticized hospital evictions in the social media. We managed to overturn hefty court fines in seven cases against people demonstrating against the government's health measures from their cars.

The COVID-19 pandemic that emerged in parallel with the further deterioration of the rule of law posed a huge challenge to our organisation. However, thanks to the commitment and perseverance of our staff, the moral and financial assistance of our supporters and donors, other members of civil society, and the cooperation of independent media and our professional partners, we have shown that together, even in such a difficult situation, we can successfully defend human rights and the fair functioning of the State. Thank you once again.

Kádár András Kristóf
Co-Chair, Hungarian Helsinki Committee

YOUR RIGHTS, OUR MISSION!

We protect

human dignity through legal and public activity.

We help

guarantee humane and fair treatment for asylum-seekers.

We defend

the rule of law and independent civil society.

We speak up for

humane detention conditions.

We translate

Hungarian official and legal language into plain language that all Hungarians can understand their rights, even without a law degree.

We train

lawyers, government experts, judges, academics and students in Hungary, and in many countries around the world.

We work together

with other civil society organisations, researchers, domestic and international organisations, and all State and non-governmental actors who value human rights.

We represent

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

We strengthen

social solidarity, civic courage, individual and social responsibility.

We safeguard

civic controls on power, and a system of checks and balances so that no one's vulnerable position can be abused.

We believe

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

We held altogether 125 advocacy briefings for international organisations and foreign diplomats on the Hungarian human rights situation.

The HHC Refugee Programme provided legal assistance to 799 asylum-seekers, refugees, stateless persons and migrants threatened by unlawful expulsion.

We helped 15 persons join their refugee family member in Hungary, often after years of separation.

The HHC Human Rights Counselling Office provided legal assistance to 985 persons (394 cases of detention and criminal proceedings, 43 instances of ill-treatment by authorities, 52 occasions of unlawful police measures, 55 rule of law issues, and 441 times of giving general legal information or a referral to other entities).

58 percent of HHC-represented asylum appeals were successful in court.

After more than a decade of work, we have contributed to completely reducing prison overcrowding from 140 percent down to the normally permitted level.

We have developed a clear and accessible letter of rights in 10 different languages in 10 countries.

83 of our clients received refugee status or subsidiary protection in Hungary, despite the quasi-impossibility of obtaining such protection in Hungary.

We trained over 1,760 professionals from all over the world (1,400 on asylum, statelessness and migration; 160 on the rule of law and human rights; and 200 on criminal justice-related issues).

Our online outreach continued to grow dynamically, reaching 5,738 followers on Twitter (16% growth) and 37,072 on Facebook (11% growth). We doubled our Instagram outreach in 2020. Our blog had 597,915 unique visitors in 2020. 2130 people attended our primarily online events focusing on raising awareness of human rights issues and expanding our support base.

We further increased our media presence in 2020 by achieving 916 relevant mentions in the Hungarian press, and at least 336 in international media.

WHY HELSINKI?

The Hungarian Helsinki Committee is a Hungarian public benefit organisation. For the most part it deals with human rights violations by the Hungarian authorities. So what do we have to do with Helsinki?

Helsinki is a human rights trademark that stems from a prestigious human rights movement. The governments of Europe and North America signed the Helsinki Final Act on August 1, 1975 in which they committed themselves to respect fundamental human rights. As a result of the change of regime, groups in the countries of the former-Soviet bloc, referring to Helsinki in their names, started asking for their own new governments to ascribe to the human rights guaranteed in the Act.

The Hungarian group was formed in 1989, primarily for civilian scrutiny of the fairness of the first free parliamentary elections.

What does it mean to be a protector of human rights and a human rights organisation?

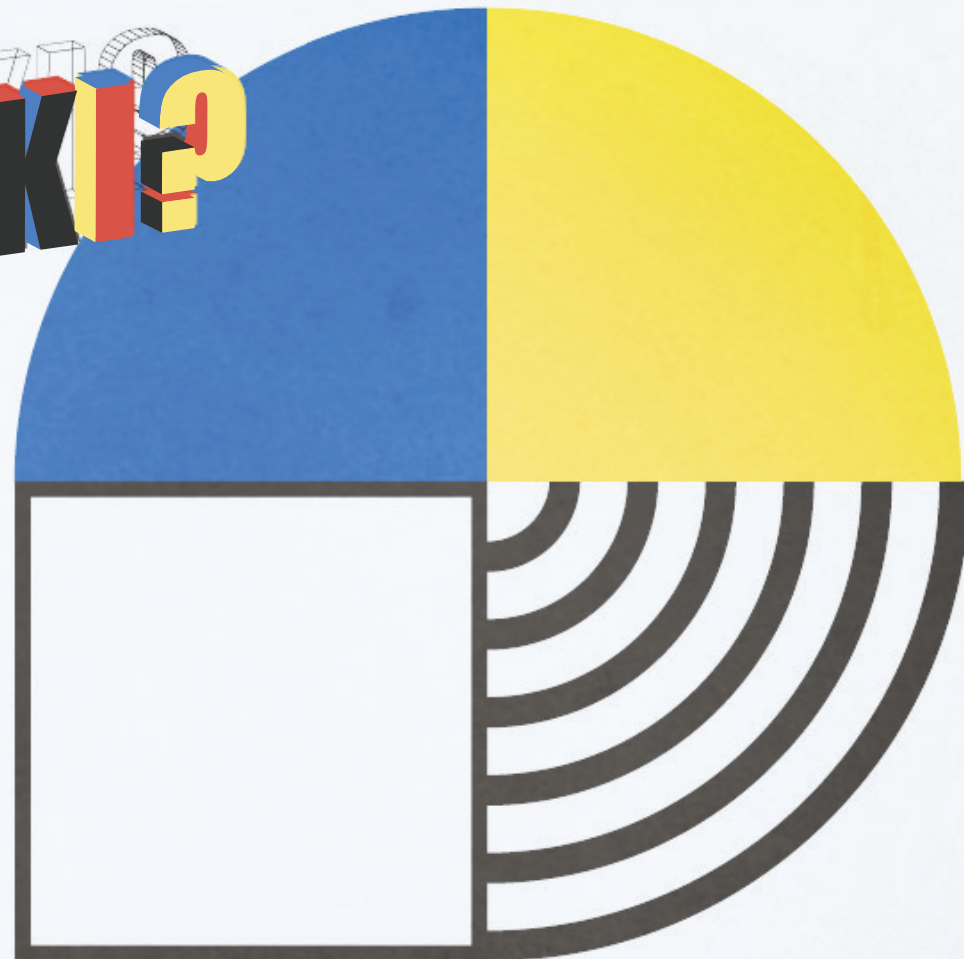
We sometimes feel vulnerable in the face of the giant state. Many people (those with disabilities, Roma, foreigners, etc.) are even more vulnerable, disadvantaged or unable to assert their own interests because, for example, they do not have the money for a lawyer if their rights have been violated.

The Hungarian Helsinki Committee helps those whose human rights the state violated. Our clients are refugees, detainees, discriminated people, and people who have been put at a disadvantage because they have stood up for themselves or their peers.

Who is this mysterious woman with a raised index finger in our logo?

The woman originally featured in a woodcut by renowned Art Nouveau illustrator Aubrey Beardsley (1872–1898), the picture was made for the 1893 edition of Thomas Malory's medieval history, *Le Morte d'Arthur* (History of King Arthur and his Knights, Knights of the Round Table). The excellent book designer József Pintér had the idea twenty years ago to make one of the details of the picture the logo of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee.

The strict female face and the warning hand express the mission of our organisation: to vigilantly protect fundamental rights, and to take action against the abuse of power by legal means and with the help of publicity.





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OUR ACTIVITIES

As a world-renowned human rights NGO, the Hungarian Helsinki Committee works for a world where human rights are respected.

OUR WORK
FOCUSES
ON THREE
MAIN AREAS:

PROTECTING DEMOCRATIC VALUES, THE RULE OF LAW AND INDEPENDENT CIVIL SOCIETY

Where there is the rule of law, a minister, police officer or a mayor are all required to follow the same rules as you. No one is above the law. Where there is the rule of law, no democratically elected government can do just anything it wants. Judges, ombudsmen, NGOs and journalists ensure that the government does not abuse its power. Where there is the rule of law, you can always find out why the government is doing something, and if you do not like it, you can also tell it publicly. Where there is the rule of law, you can live in safety because you know exactly what the state expects of you, as well as what you can expect from it.

Where there is no rule of law, there can be punishment, dismissal, abuse or imprisonment for daring to criticise the government. Where there is no rule of law, a doctor cannot openly say that the hospital wall is crumbling or that there are not enough bandages or nurses. Where there is no rule of law,

there is corruption; and it is not talented people who get into leadership and well-paying positions, but nepotism. Where there is no rule of law, police officers, judges and journalists work at the political behest of the government, and not according to their own professional compass. Where there is no rule of law, workers and the poor are at the mercy of state power. Where there is no rule of law, there is fear and mistrust, and there is no one to protect you if you get into trouble or suffer an injustice.

The rule of law is a better state. That is why we work every day so that we can all live under the rule of law. The rule of law has severely deteriorated in Hungary since 2010. Our work for rule of law is more important today than ever.

ASYLUM AND INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

There are still plenty of armed conflicts in the world today, from Afghanistan to Syria to Somalia. Torture, slavery, and ill-treatment are still prevalent in many places today. It is often enough for your religion, lifestyle or political opinion to be different from what the current power expects. Many times it is enough to just be in the wrong place at the wrong time: bombings and war massacres take their victims indiscriminately. We have seen only too recently that safe and prosperous countries can sink into chaos and misery in a few years, and as a result, millions can become persecuted.

We believe that no one should be killed, tortured or humiliated. We believe that no one should be imprisoned or hurt because they stand for democracy; because they write the truth as a journalist; because they are a Christian or a Muslim, or even because they are not religious; because they were born gay or transgender; because they are

conservative, liberal or social democrat; because they do not want to march to their death as a soldier; or because they want to live according to their own decisions and not be forced to abide by oppressive laws. That is why we help those who have not been lucky enough to be born in a peaceful, free place and are forced to leave their homes to save their lives and preserve their human dignity.

PROTECTING THE RIGHTS OF DETAINEES AND DUE PROCESS IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Throughout our lives, many of us come into contact with the police and the courts. You can also have your ID checked by a police officer on the street, charged for speeding, or just fined because there are no bell on your bike. You may end up in a similar situation as a victim. For example, you may turn to the police because you have been attacked on the basis of your skin colour, religion, origin, political beliefs, or because someone did not like the looks of the person you are walking with. If you find yourself in this situation, you have the right to have the authorities explain what is happening to you and what your rights are in an understandable way. You have the right to a lawyer who will represent your interests, and the right for the police treat you fairly during questioning.

Prison conditions reveal a lot about a society. In a democratic European country, no matter what a person has done, it must not result in torture or inhumane detention. Today, hundreds of detainees are held in Hungarian prisons simply for misdemeanors such as not

being able to pay a fine. Many people have to spend months in pre-trial detention to find out in the end that they have not done anything wrong.

In recent decades, severe overcrowding has developed in Hungarian prisons. It was not uncommon for only one person in a cell to be able to get up from their bed at a time because there was so little space. 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 upon release, 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.



BORBÁLA IVÁNYI
HHC ATTORNEY

We provide legal representation in vital cases for many people who could not otherwise afford or have access to it.

OUR METHODS

METHODS GOALS

Free legal counselling

- To help thousands of victims of human rights violations who cannot count on anyone else;
- To demonstrate through individual stories when Hungarian law violates human rights, and to identify cases suitable for strategic litigation; and
- To 'channel in' cases for strategic litigation and up-to-date information about state practices for evidence-based advocacy.

Strategic litigation

- To challenge unlawful state policies and practices before domestic courts by selecting strategic cases; and
- To bring those human rights concerns that cannot be resolved domestically to competent international fora.

Monitoring and research

- To maintain direct lines of communication with prisoners and refugees to ensure up-to-date information; and
- To shed light on human rights concerns not yet researched and addressed by anyone else.

Legislative advocacy

- To influence legislation so that it meets human rights requirements.

METHODS GOALS

International advocacy

- To help to continuously inform international actors (in particular the EU, the Council of Europe and UN bodies) regarding the human rights situation in Hungary, and to motivate them to take action to force Hungary to comply with its international human rights obligations.

Awareness-raising and media work

- To strengthen the impact of our work by involving the public, keeping journalists informed about our achievements, and being actively present in social media; and
- To organise events and online campaigns to get our messages to as many people as possible.

Training, education and capacity-building

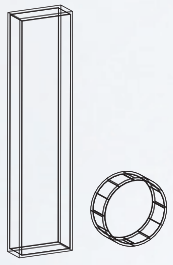
- To prepare and motivate social actors who can improve human rights through their work; and
- To promote inclusive, innovative and interactive training methods worldwide.

Empowerment

- To strengthen the human rights awareness of marginalised groups and provide them with as many tools as possible to help them protect their own rights; and
- To inspire democratic participation in wider segments of Hungarian society.

International cooperation

- To be actively involved in a number of international collaborations and organisations to make our work for human rights more effective.



WE DEFEND THE RULE OF LAW AND INDEPENDENT CIVIL SOCIETY IN A SHRINKING DEMOCRATIC SPACE

1. We have acted in defense of the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary

Hungary has been hit by the COVID-19 pandemic in a shrinking democratic space. Yet, we have still managed to continue to focus international attention on the deteriorating rule of law, and the government's continued weakening of the system of checks and balances. We have briefed foreign diplomats and representatives of the EU and other international organisations on rule of law developments on more than 70 occasions.

Together with six other Hungarian NGOs, we submitted our comments to the European Commission's first Rule of Law Report, which later reflected many of the concerns expressed in our submission. We tried to give the report as much attention as possible in Hungary through online discussions and podcasts.

We drew special attention to the fact that judicial independence is still in danger in Hungary. For example, we have published an analysis of government attacks on the courts and irregularities in the election of the new President of the Kúria (Supreme Court). Together with our civil society partners, we made legislative

proposals to promote judicial independence. Our petition contributed to the decision by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe which articulated that freedom of expression of Hungarian judges is still in danger.

2. We opposed further weakening of the rule of law by the government on the pretext of the COVID-19 pandemic

In cooperation with our civil partners, and with the help of legal resolutions and background materials, we drew the attention of the Hungarian and international public to the concerns related to the Authorisation Act. This law made it possible for the government to rule by decree indefinitely. Later, we also highlighted how the government will be able to keep important elements of its extraordinary powers even when the crisis ends and the period of the ordinary legal order returns.

During the first wave of the pandemic, we created a public, English-language 'law tracker' to follow government emergency ordinances and briefly describe their contents. This initiative, unique in the EU, has proven to be a valuable source of information for international actors.

We made detailed analysis of the government measures taken under the pretext of the COVID-19 pandemic and which had a negative impact on the rule of law. We have paid particular attention to the new rules against 'rumour-mongering', which allows unjustified restrictions on freedom of expression. We also addressed the militarisation that emerged in health care; specifically, what are the soldiers doing posted at health care institutions?

3. We supported independent civil society

We continue to take action against government attacks on NGOs.

In 2017, the European Commission initiated infringement proceedings against Hungary, a process which relied heavily on our legal analyses. As a result, the European Court of Justice ruled in June 2020 that the 2017 law stigmatising NGOs receiving funding from abroad violates EU law. After this decisive victory for Hungarian civil society, we have repeatedly publicly criticised the government for failing to fulfill its obligations arising from the EU Court ruling.

We successfully represented civil society actors and journalists in various legal proceedings, whether it be concerning illegal fines or attacks on them by the propaganda media.



STEFÁNIA SPARING
FINANCIAL COORDINATOR
REFUGEE PROGRAM

The numbers and the statistics portray stories of people whose fundamental rights have been violated. With our work we want to achieve that this could not happen again, not only to our clients but to anybody.



**WE DEFEND THE RIGHT TO
ASYLUM AGAINST INHUMANE
GOVERNMENT
POLICIES**

4. We are the only non-governmental organisation in Hungary that provides legal assistance to asylum-seekers, refugees, stateless persons and vulnerable migrants.

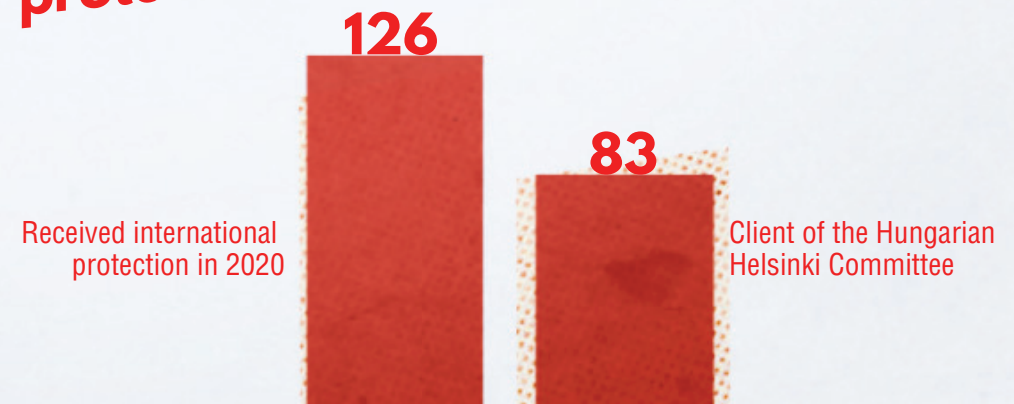
In 2020, our Refugee Programme provided free legal assistance to 799 people. We remain the only organisation in Hungary that provides such support to asylum-seekers, refugees, stateless persons and migrants threatened with illegal expulsion.

We succeeded in overturning the asylum authority's unlawful rejection decisions in 58% of the asylum cases we represented in court. Without effective state-funded legal aid, people fleeing war, torture and persecution would not be able to count on any legal support without us.

Despite the fact that due to the deliberate destruction of the asylum system it is almost impossible to obtain international protection in Hungary, 83 of our clients managed to receive refugee status or subsidiary protection in 2020.

We have achieved nine strategic victories before the European Court of Justice in recent years, giving us a leading role in the field of strategic asylum litigation in Europe. As of 31 December 2020, we had 77 asylum cases pending before the European Court of Human Rights.

**International
protection 2020**



5. We successfully challenged the massive arbitrary detention of asylum-seekers

Following almost five years of strategic litigation and advocacy efforts, we successfully put an end to the systematic, arbitrary detention of asylum-seekers in Hungary's two infamous land-border transit zones. The decision by the European Court of Justice in May 2020 ruled that this detention practice was in conflict with EU law in all respects, confirming our arguments.

As a result of the ruling, almost 300 people (half of them children) were released from the transit zones after several months, or even years of arbitrary detention. Following our complaint, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention also confirmed that detention in Hungarian transit zones is arbitrary and illegal, especially since there is no administrative or judicial remedy for such prolonged detention.

While the transit zone detention was still in place, we prevented the deliberate starvation of detainees by obtaining interim measures from the European Court of Human Rights in seven cases. As a result, the European Court of Human Rights forced the Hungarian authorities to provide food for the detainees in all seven cases.

Iranian filmmaker Abouzar Soltani and his now 12 year-old son were detained in the Röszke transit zone for a year and a half. The man had a good job in Iran working in PR for a health care provider, and as a decorator.

What can be publicly said about the reasons of his flights from Iran is that he thought of the world differently than the prevailing view in Iran and was harassed for it. He decided to leave his homeland with his son. He wanted to live in a place where someone who had a different opinion did not have to be afraid. However, the Hungarian authorities refused to look into the substance of his asylum application, saying that they had arrived via Serbia (which was deemed safe) and not directly from Iran. For a time, the man was even starved in the camp until the Strasbourg Court intervened.

For a time, the man was even starved in the camp until the Strasbourg Court intervened. In the meantime, he learned to make films. Compensating for the oppressive monotony of the transit zone and the forced inaction, he shot a film about his son and his lost childhood with his cell phone.

Even though his films were screened at the Budapest International Documentary Festival (BIDF) and VERZIO Film Festival, he and his son were not released from the transit zone for any of their premieres.



6. We effectively tackle unlawful asylum policies through strategic litigation

Four of our strategic lawsuits ended in victory before the European Court of Justice in 2020.

These judgments have outlawed most pillars of inhumane Hungarian asylum policy, including unreasonably short court deadlines; rules allowing for the automatic rejection of almost any asylum application; and mass push-back on the Serbian-Hungarian border of more than 50,000 people since 2016 without the opportunity for legal challenge.

We managed to prevent the deportation of an asylum-seeker to Pakistan who very likely would have been killed upon his return.

We help refugee families to reunite in safety in Hungary

Despite the vast challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, 15 persons were able to join their refugee family members in safety in Hungary in 2020 with our help; often after years of painful separation.

8. We are the only public voice consistently denouncing human rights violations against refugees and migrants in Hungary

We will continue to stand up for a more inclusive society and take action against xenophobic campaigns.

We have publicly spoken out through advocacy, litigation and the press against the government's efforts to accuse foreigners of spreading COVID-19. As a result, a group of illegally expelled Iranian medical students were able to return to Hungary to continue their studies.

As a result of our advocacy activities, the European Commission stated that Hungarian immigration legislation adopted under the pretext of the pandemic violates EU law. The government made a number of legislative amendments in 2020 that created unsurmountable obstacles for those who wanted to apply for asylum. Following our complaint and reports, the European Commission launched another infringement procedure against Hungary for violating EU asylum law.



9. We empower refugees and sensitise Hungarians in a context of growing xenophobia

We have embarked on pilot initiatives to mitigate the negative effects of the government's xenophobic propaganda it has been spreading since 2015.

With the involvement of a refugee woman of Afghan origin, we held awareness-raising events for young people and organised innovative sensitisation sessions for local governments.

We have held awareness-raising trainings for refugees, stateless persons and migrants to help and motivate them to take action on their own against manifestations of discrimination and xenophobia.

10. We promote innovative training globally in the field of migration

We have maintained our global reputation as professional training experts on asylum and forced migration. Our refugee programme staff trained more than 1,400 people from all over the world in four languages.

We continued to support sustainable asylum education in innovative ways, including participating in the establishment of university refugee-law clinics, and the publication of a five-language guide to help their operation. We also held a number of trainings on the rights of stateless persons.

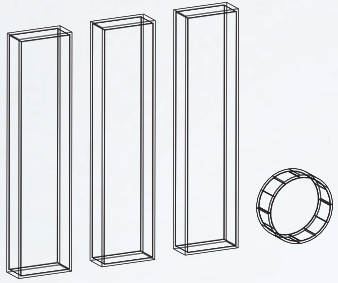
We are presumably the only European refugee assisting NGO whose innovative training services are regularly used by authorities and courts around the world.



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IVÓNA BIEBER
HHC ATTORNEY

I consider myself extremely lucky for working with colleagues who are inspiring both professionally and personally.



WE DEFEND THE FAIRNESS OF THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM AND THE RIGHTS OF DETAINEES

11. We champion the issue of accessible information criminal proceedings

How can someone exercise their rights if they do not understand what they are? The obligation to inform those involved in criminal proceedings about what they can and cannot do is in vain if they do not understand their rights. We continued to act as the leading civil society actor advocating for more accessible, comprehensible and plain language information to be provided to suspects and accused persons in criminal proceedings in Europe.

We developed, and made available for free, the world's first online education module on the use of plain language in criminal proceedings. The module is now available in ten languages. In 2020, 158 judicial professionals in ten European countries completed this training.

▶ At the court hearing about detaining you

You can ask the judge to release you

At the court hearing, you can request your release. You can also request:

1. to be held under house arrest. This means that the court determines where you must stay. For example, they may require that you must stay home and you can only leave your home for 1 hour twice a week.
2. a restraining order. This means that you cannot go to certain places or near specific people.
3. to be released on bail. You will get the bail money back if you participate in the procedure (for example, you always appear in court), and behave as ordered by the court.

The judge will only release you if they are sure that you:

- will not disappear from the eyes of the authorities;
- will participate in the procedure;
- will not hide or destroy evidence;
- will not interfere with witnesses; and
- will not commit a crime.

You can appeal the decision ordering your pre-trial detention

If the judge decides to order your pre-trial detention, you can appeal right there at the court hearing. You will stay detained until your appeal is decided.

▶ If your pre-trial detention is ordered

You can ask the court to review your pre-trial detention

From time to time, the court must consider whether you should continue to be detained. You can find the review date on the judgment about the detention or in the decision to extend your detention.

If you want the court to release you, you should write to the court at least 2 weeks before the date of the review hearing. You must convince the court that you:

- will not disappear, and you will appear if you receive a court order;
- will not obstruct the criminal investigation; and
- will not commit another crime.

You must also demonstrate these in detail, for example by describing:

- what you will live on (your source of income);
- where you will live;
- what your family circumstances are; or
- that the criminal investigation has been going on for so long that all the evidence has already been gathered.

In addition, if new evidence or circumstances have arisen in your case then you can ask the court to release you at any time. You can request this as well if 3 months have passed since you submitted your last request for review.

You cannot be held indefinitely without a judgment

The maximum length of your pre-trial detention without a judgment by a court of first instance depends on how serious the crime is.

How many years in prison can you be sentenced to at most?	How many years can you be held in pre-trial detention without a judgment by a court of first instance?
3 years	1 year
5 years	2 years
10 years	3 years
20 years	4 years
life	indefinitely

12. We promote fair petty offence and criminal procedures that respect people's rights

We have worked with other NGOs to change the unreasonably strict and malfunctioning misdemeanor system.

With our help, a young man with a mental disability was released from prison who was illegally detained for 71 days for littering and other offenses.

We published a gap-filling report on discrimination against Roma in the Hungarian criminal justice system.

A mildly mentally disabled, hyperactive young man with attention-deficit is simply unable to comply with all the rules. He finds it much more difficult to identify the expectations of his environment than an average 20 year-old. For this, he was constantly fined by police. For example, he was fined several times for scattering his clothes on the street or for not having an ID card.

The violations resulted in fines amounting to more than one million forints. The young man could not pay, so he was imprisoned. The family did not know what had happened to him for weeks. Eventually, they learned from a [letter](#) that he had been taken to prison to for 153 days as he could not pay the fine of nearly 1 million forints.

Under the Misdemeanor Act, a person with a disability cannot be detained or locked up. Yet the 20 year-old had to wait 71 days in prison for his release. The desperate family turned to the Hungarian Helsinki Committee for help.

13. We defend the right to peaceful assembly

2020 brought an important victory for the right to peaceful assembly before the European Court of Human Rights. The judgment, in which one of our attorneys was the actual plaintiff, established that there had been a violation of the right to peaceful assembly when the police unlawfully banned a peaceful demonstration in front of the Hungarian President's residence.

We assisted several protesters involved in the anti-government 'car demonstrations' held in the spring who had been excessively fined by the police despite properly complying with the pandemic distancing rules. We also provided assistance to demonstrators who, despite not representing any health-related risk, were banned from protesting against government measures curbing the rights of LGBTQI people.

14. We stand up against torture, ill-treatment and hate crimes in Hungary

We continued to be the only organisation in Hungary to take effective action against perpetrators of torture and ill-treatment, and to take the lead in the fight against impunity for hate crimes.

We successfully represented a 70-year-old man before the European Court of Human Rights who was the victim of ill-treatment by police, including severe beatings, humiliation and being dragged on the ground. The Court found that the prohibition of torture and ill-treatment had been violated, and that Hungary had failed to investigate the complaint of torture.

A 70-year-old man was subjected to a house search by police looking for a stolen laptop. The man had **nothing to do with the case**. In fact, he did not even know what a laptop was. The hands of the retired clarinetist, who had no criminal record, were handcuffed behind his back in his home. The handcuffs were later removed because the man's hands began to turn blue.

He was then taken to the police station where he was first insulted and reminded that he went to the mayor's office too often in his construction permit case. Then he was abused, beaten to the head and dragged on the ground by two police officers. The torture only ceased when he became ill. No ambulance was called. His body was covered with contusions and bruises.

He reported his abusers, but the Prosecutor's Office only heard his case a year later. Although he named the police officers, the prosecutor terminated the investigation without even interrogating them. Following an inquiry by the Ombudsman, the investigation was reopened, but again no incriminating evidence was found. The man turned to the Strasbourg Court with our help.



As a result of our work, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe stated that Hungary is not responding adequately to systemic deficiencies in the investigation and punishment of police abuse.

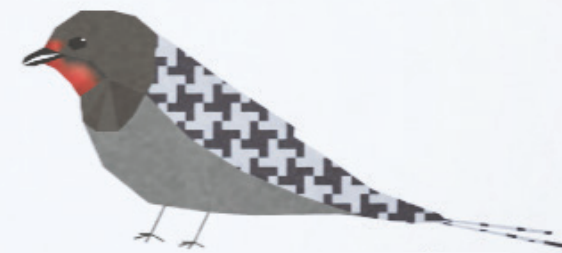
We provided legal assistance to 43 people who complained about ill-treatment by law enforcement officials. We continued to play a key role in the Working Group on Hate Crimes, which the European Commission has identified as a good practice. We also carried on providing legal assistance to victims of hate crimes before domestic and international courts.

15. We fight for the rights of detainees and their families

We contributed to end overcrowding in Hungarian prisons through decades of research, advocacy and strategic litigation.

The European Court of Human Rights found that the right to privacy and family life of our formerly detained client had been violated when he was not allowed to meet his dying father for the last time.

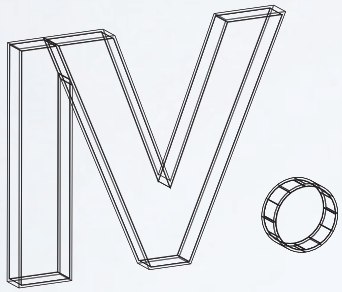
We are founding members of the advocacy and empowerment group called 'Support Network for Detainees and Their Families' (FECSKE in Hungarian), which helps inmates and their families build community and raise legal awareness.



**FOR DETAINEES
AND THEIR FAMILIES**

A man was detained in Baracska Prison for traffic-related petty offenses. He asked the prison warden for three days leave without being accompanied by prison guards so that he could say goodbye in person to his father dying of cancer. This is possible under domestic law, and prison officials are required to make a decision in a timely manner on such applications.

He did not receive a decision by the deadline, and his father died in the meantime. It was later revealed that his request was denied because he asked to say goodbye to his father on his deathbed without his handcuffs.



WE BUILD A HUMAN RIGHTS-CONSCIOUS SOCIETY BASED ON SOLIDARITY

16. We are a prominent public voice defending human rights in Hungary and abroad

Despite the alarmingly shrinking press freedom, we managed to further increase our strong media presence in 2020. We appeared 916 times in the independent Hungarian press and at least 336 times in the international media. Our online reach also continued to grow dynamically, reaching 5,738 followers on Twitter and 37,072 followers on Facebook. We doubled our Instagram followers in 2020 to 2,872. Our popular blog had 597,915 views during the year, with several blogposts reaching more than 10,000 readers each. We reached an additional 2130 people mainly through our online events.

Our online presence showed strong growth in 2020:

The number of our [Twitter](#) followers (mainly targeting international media and partners in English) grew by 16% in 2020; reaching nearly 5,738 users by the end of the year;

Our [Facebook](#) page (our main social media channel aimed at the wider Hungarian public), with an average of 3 daily posts, attracted over 37,072 followers by the end of the year. This represents an 11% growth;

The HHC [Instagram](#) account launched last year (targeting a younger Hungarian audience in particular) has already gained over 2,872 followers; basically doubling our outreach on this forum since last year;

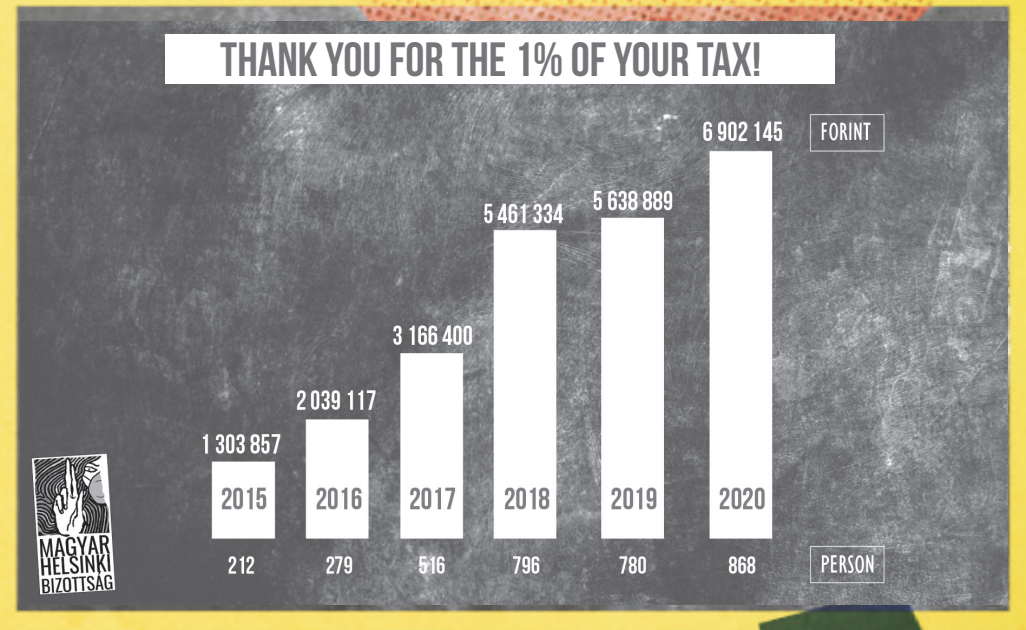
Our Helsinki Figyelő blog featured 203 new posts in 2020, receiving over 597,915 individual visits, with several posts attracting more than 10,000 visits each. The blog continued to feature the popular Human Rights Calendar stories, and reflected on important current topics;

Our new [online talkshow Helsinki Hangadó](#), launched in May quickly became popular. Each edition was watched by between 4,000 and 12,000 people on Facebook and Soundcloud. The talkshow usually covered current human rights issues, and often featured external experts and partner organisations besides the HHC's own experts;

Our [website](#) received 249,666 visits, 47% more than in 2019; and

The number of our main newsletter recipients grew by 9%, reaching 3,022 people by the end of 2020.

We received professional in-kind help from the Hi! online marketing agency (Hirdessneten.hu) to create the advertisements for our 2020 1% tax campaign.



BERNADETT NAGY
COMMUNITY AND SUPPORT ORGANISER

Since the introduction of automated personal tax returns, fewer and fewer people in Hungary utilise their option to donate 1% of their taxes to non-profits each year. It is a huge achievement that despite the generally declining trend, more and more people support the work of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee with their 1%. We are proud that those we work for recognise that our work is needed.

17. We helped marginalised groups and medical professionals during the most difficult periods of the COVID-19 pandemic

The unprecedented pandemic situation has prompted us to go beyond our traditional mandate and to take part in various solidarity actions. The court-awarded compensation we received from the government for damaging our reputation was donated to a foundation that provides protective equipment for health workers.

We collected and donated laptops for socially-disadvantaged children so that they could participate in on-line school classes, and sewed face masks for people at a homeless shelter featuring the logo of our organisation.

We established cooperation with the Hungarian Medical Chamber, and we provided gap-filling free legal advice to 92 health professionals working on the front line of the health crisis.

In recognition of all these efforts, the European Economic and Social Committee awarded our organisation with the 2021 Civil Solidarity Prize.

18. We promote solidarity with victims of government propaganda attacks and other policies

We have stood up against government attacks and aggressive measures against Roma and LGBTQI people in cases such as:

- a law that prohibits legal gender recognition for transgender people;
- government statements in connection with a children's book of fairy tales featuring various vulnerable groups;
- the 9th Amendment to the Fundamental Law stigmatising LGBTQI people;
- making adoption more difficult for non-married people; and
- making it impossible for Roma children who have been illegally segregated to receive financial compensation.

In several cases, we have joined or coordinated the joint action of NGOs on these issues.

We have repeatedly approached the Ombudsman to take action on these and other human rights issues affecting minority communities.

19. We organised an innovative human rights education programme for young people

What can we learn from the experiences of repressive, Nazi and Communist regimes? How do we remember the victims? Why do we forget these stories? How did we benefit from the regime change? What do human rights institutions mean? Why is it worth preserving them, and what role debates play in this? We talked about these questions and similar issues in our extraordinary education programme for young people.

History, art, and experiential learning form the foundation of our human rights education programme. We use alternative means to help young people see perspectives that are not typically in the mainstream media, and use these insights to counterbalance the often harmful stereotypes about marginalised groups.

We have successfully adapted to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic

Besides trying to support those social groups who were most in need at the time of the pandemic, we also often needed support.

We would like to thank our supporters!



Masha



Leo



Koba



Schrödinger



Szultán & Julcsi



Levi



Bru



Keks



Brúnó

Our revenues in 2020

Private Foundations

Oak Foundation	106 403 865	24,66%
Foundation Open Society Institute	67 805 896	15,72%
Sigrid Rausing Trust	57 170 193	13,25%
Swedish Postcode Foundation	30 652 262	7,11%
Fund for Global Human Rights (FGHR)	4 640 143	1,08%
National Endowment for Democracy (NED)	3 143 778	0,73%
European Programme for Integration and Migration (EPIM)	1 427 724	0,33%
Total	271 243 861	62,87%

United Nations

UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)	62 882 256	14,58%
UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture (UNVFVT)	11 677 661	2,71%
Total	74 559 917	17,28%

European Union

European Commission	22 312 255	5,17%
Total	22 312 255	5,17%

NGOs and educational institutions

Pro Asyl Foundation	8 419 267	1,95%
Dutch Council for Refugees	4 488 040	1,04%
Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights	3 968 201	0,92%
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC)	2 178 736	0,51%
European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)	1 533 693	0,36%
Central European University (CEU)	994 320	0,23%
EU–Russia Civil Society Forum	82 898	0,02%
Total	21 665 155	5,02%

Embassies

Embassy of the United States of America in Hungary	3 421 868	0,79%
Total	3 421 868	0,79%

Other

1% personal income tax donation	6 903 907	1,60%
Income from public benefit activities	2 191 798	0,51%
Membership fees	40 000	0,01%
Other income and donations	29 063 204	6,74%
Total	38 198 909	8,85%

Total Income (HUF)

431 401 965

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