



2025 IMPACT REPORT



HUNGARIAN
HELSINKI
COMMITTEE

As an independent civil society organisation, the Hungarian Helsinki Committee (HHC) has worked since 1989 to advance a democratic society grounded in human dignity, where everyone can freely exercise their human rights. In 2025, we faced unprecedented challenges. Gearing up to the 2026 elections, the Hungarian government intensified its efforts to undermine independent civil society organisations and silence critical voices, while the global human rights and humanitarian sector was plunged into a financial crisis. Despite these difficult circumstances, the HHC remained a resilient and determined defender of democracy, the rule of law and human rights. We provided free legal assistance to **2,588** people in need, secured eight victories before the European Court of Human Rights and a landmark judgment before the Court of Justice of the European Union, and used our legal expertise to support Hungarians resisting increasingly heavy-handed authoritarianism. This annual report offers a brief overview of our most important achievements. For more detailed information in English, please visit [our website](#) and follow us on [LinkedIn](#).

2,588

In 2025, we continued to play a leading role in defending independent civil society in Hungary amidst unprecedented threats. For example:

- In May, the Hungarian government **introduced** the 'Bill on the Transparency of Public Life', which, if adopted, would have allowed the government to blacklist and financially strangle civil society organisations and independent media outlets that receive foreign funding and are deemed to 'threaten Hungary's sovereignty'. This proposed law was part of a broader effort to suppress critical views and the exposure of abuse of office, targeting entities that allegedly violate or negatively portray selected values defined in Hungary's Fundamental Law (Constitution). The bill proposed imposing severe restrictions on blacklisted organisations, including blocking access to foreign, including EU and UN, funding (which provides the vast majority of human rights CSOs' funding in Hungary), creating administrative obstacles for collecting domestic private donations, and potentially leading to their dissolution. From the outset, we played a central role alongside our civil society partners **in the fight** against the bill through public protests, legal analysis, informing the public, assisting organisations lacking legal expertise, and participating in the development of a joint strategy. Our advocacy work ensured that international public opinion, as well as the institutions of the European Union and the Council of Europe, understood the gravity of the threat. The government ultimately postponed the parliamentary debate on the bill as a result of combined domestic and European pressure.



- We have once again demonstrated that government propaganda cannot spread false information about independent civil society organisations with impunity. As a result of our work over several years, a final court ruling has **declared** that the Ministry of Justice damaged the HHC's reputation when a former deputy minister of justice **falsely** accused the HHC of having stayed silent against police brutality after the mass demonstrations of 23 October 2006. The court ordered the ministry to issue an apology and pay one million forints (~ 2,800 euros) in damages, both of which obligations have since been fulfilled.



We stood firmly with groups targeted by an ever-increasingly oppressive government, whether they were opposition activists, immigrants or LGBTIQ people. For example:

- We played an instrumental role in ensuring that the 2025 Budapest Pride, the **most massive act of protest** against Hungary's increasingly authoritarian regime in 15 years, could go ahead peacefully with police protection. Despite a government ban, the Pride march attracted an estimated 300,000 people, without any violence or **reprisals** against demonstrators. The HHC served as the primary **source** of legal information for both Hungarian and foreign institutions and protesters to counterbalance intimidation attempts, coordinated all related international advocacy **efforts** to rally international support for freedom of assembly, and took legal action at several stages of the preparatory process.



- We also **supported** the Pride march in Pécs, which was unlawfully banned but ultimately successfully **took place**. Our legal **information materials**, which clarified issues of concern to many potential participants, were key here too in the fight against government intimidation. An HHC attorney acted as defence counsel for the main organiser of Pécs Pride, who **faced criminal charges** for having organised an illegal protest. In June 2026, the prosecution finally **dropped all charges** against him. The case was also supported by Amnesty International Hungary, the Háttér Society and the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union.



- Legal gender recognition was banned in Hungary in 2020. We found a creative way to challenge this major setback in LGBTIQ rights through the case of a trans refugee man, whom we had also represented in his asylum case, using EU data protection rules (the General Data Protection Regulation). After a lengthy litigation process with the help of our partner, the Háttér Association, the Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU) **confirmed our position** and **ruled** that EU member states must allow gender marker changes as a matter of data protection rights, regardless of the existence of a procedure for the legal recognition of trans identity in the domestic legal context. The CJEU also found that while member states can reasonably require evidence from the person concerned in this process, they are not allowed to make the right to rectify the gender marker conditional upon a gender confirmation surgery.

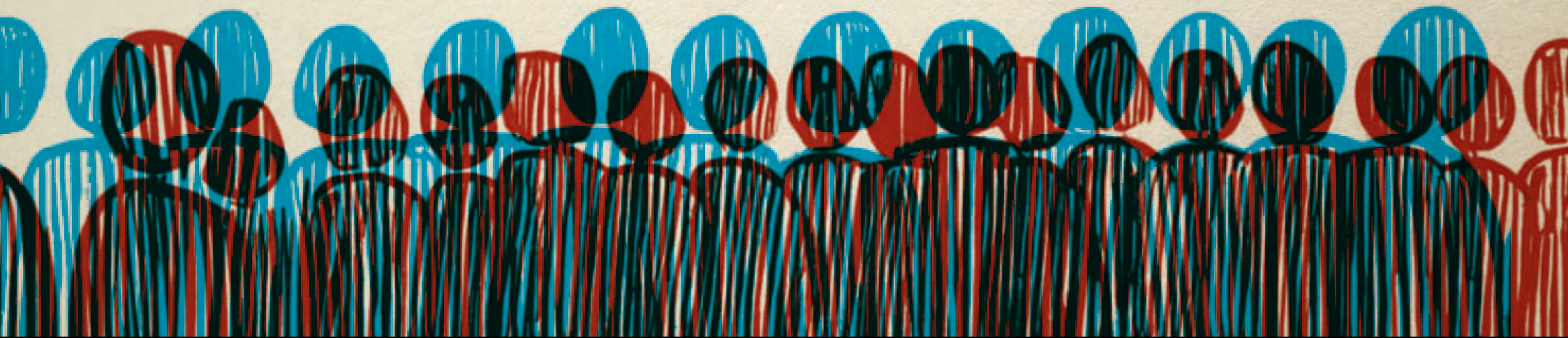


- We **succeeded** in ensuring that Rena, a woman from the Philippines, could remain in Hungary with her three-month-old Hungarian baby and her Hungarian husband, despite being expelled in an absurdly inhumane manner, just two months after the birth of their child.



The Gulyás family

- When the gravest mass breach of personal data occurred in Hungary in recent decades, affecting hundreds of thousands of supporters of the opposition TISZA party, we assisted victims by publishing a template for filing a complaint to the police.



- Despite the prosecution's earlier refusal to press charges, we **pursued** justice through supplementary private prosecution proceedings and secured a one-year prison sentence for committing a hate crime. The conviction concerned a man who, together with his accomplices, driven by politically motivated hatred, violently attacked young anti-fascists peacefully walking in the street in 2019.

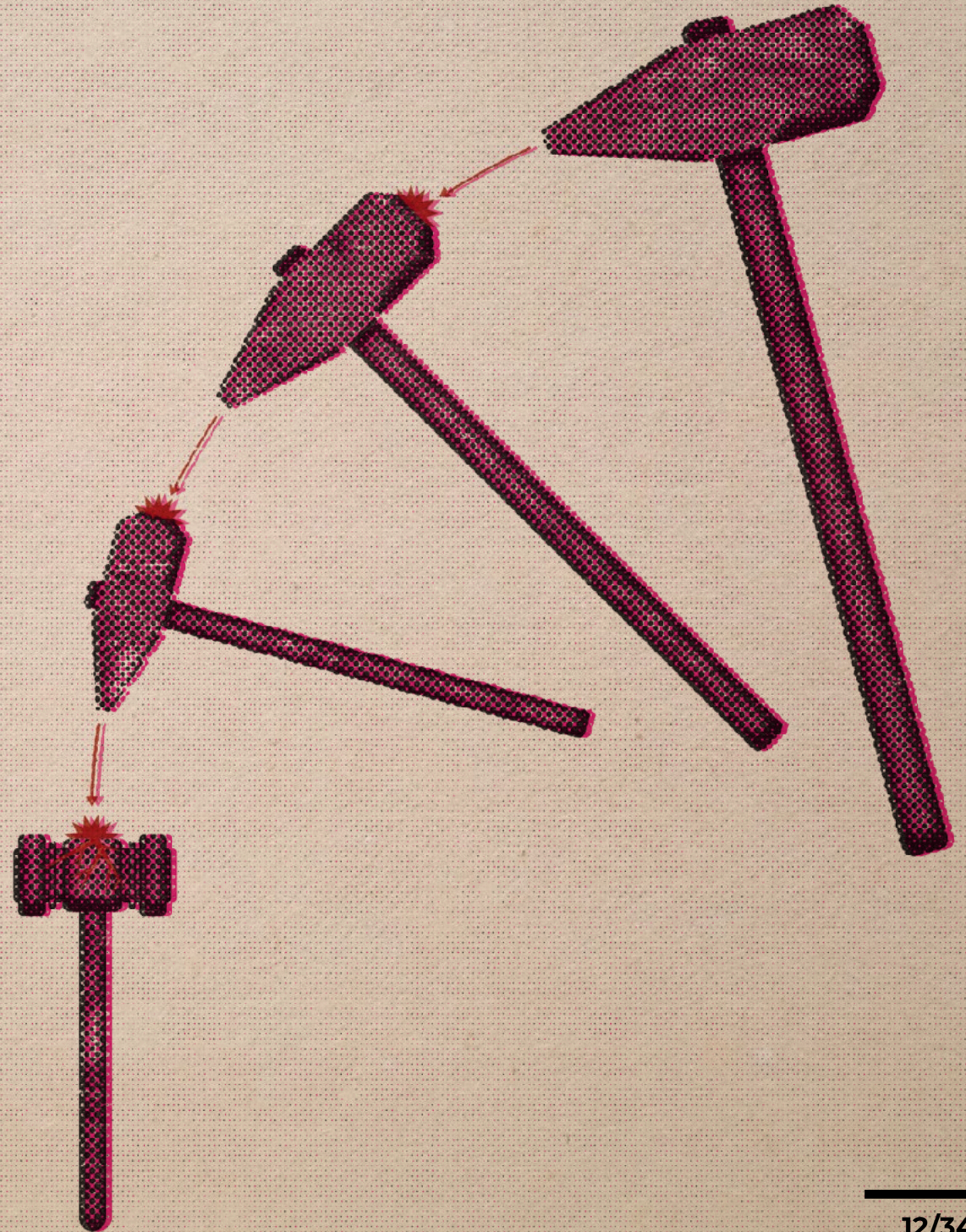
The victims with HHC attorney
Borbála Ivány (in the middle)



- In response to the growing awareness of abuse and systemic failures in the child protection system, **we reviewed** the Ombudsperson's reports from the past decade to assess whether investigations had identified abuses and, if so, how the state had responded. Our groundbreaking analysis exposed that many of the problems only recently brought to public attention had been known for years, while the state consistently failed to meet its responsibility to address them. Our report, which received enormous media coverage, highlighted fundamental flaws in oversight by both the Ombudsperson and the Public Prosecutor's Office, as well as broader issues of state accountability.

We supported individuals who courageously spoke out against rights violations, arbitrariness and injustice, and who in turn suffered reprisals. For example:

- We successfully represented Supreme Court (*Kúria*) judge András Kovács, whose right to freedom of expression was unlawfully restricted by András Varga Zs., the court's President, when he suspended Kovács from his position as head of panel despite his impeccable professional conduct, partly for intending to publish a study criticising the amendment of the court's case allocation system. First, the **Budapest Court**, then, in its final decision, the **Budapest Regional Court of Appeal** quashed the unlawful measure of the Supreme Court's president, marking a milestone in the defence of judicial independence in Hungary.



- We **provided** legal representation to two teachers who publicly called for an investigation into sexual abuse committed against pupils at their school, and were consequently sued for defamation by the school's former headmaster. One was also dismissed on spurious grounds despite an unblemished 24-year career without a single warning. The HHC's attorney **represented** him in the resulting labour lawsuit as well.



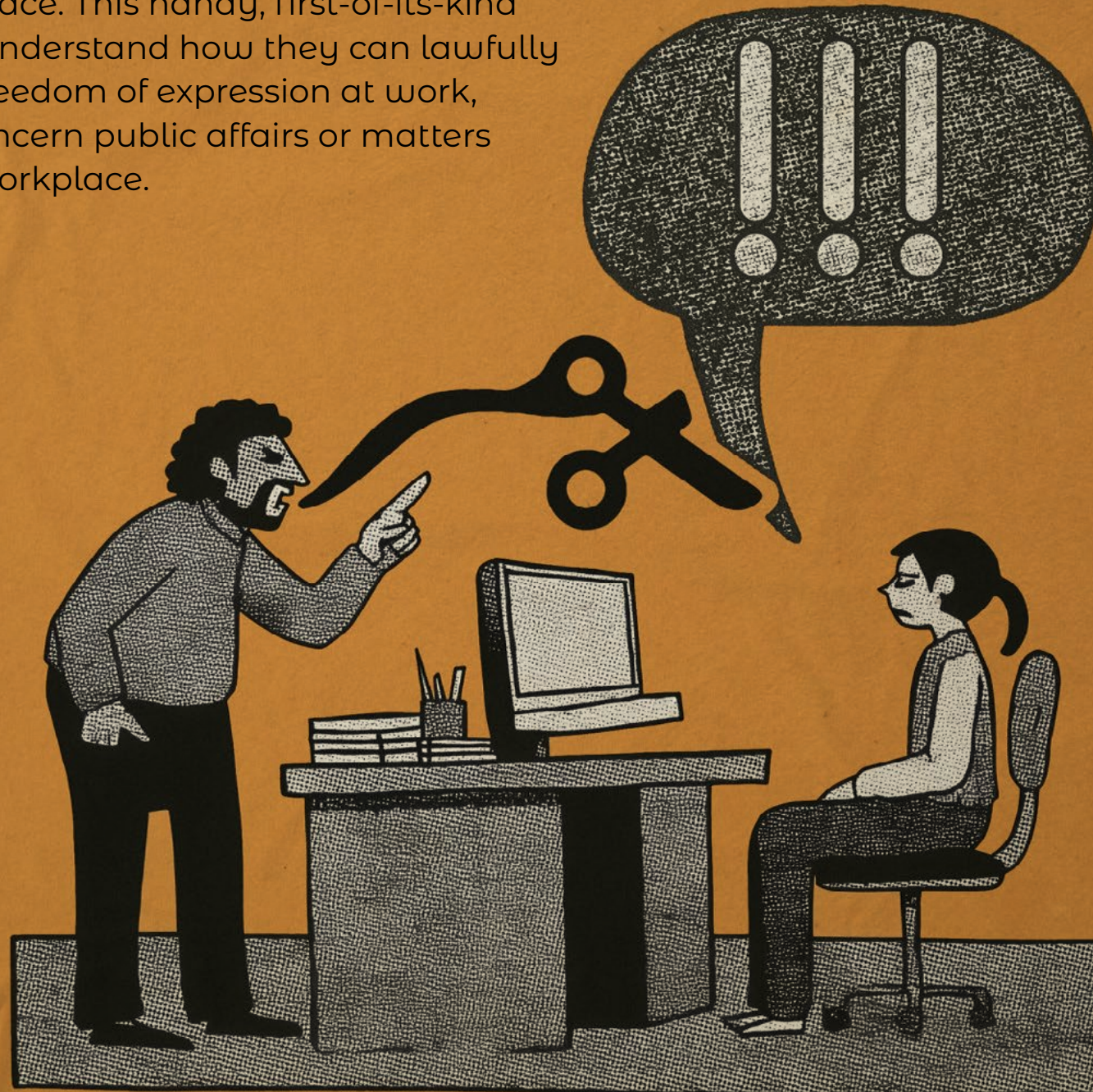
- We represented Péter Heindl, an activist from Pécs, in his appeal against the absurd verdict which convicted him of vandalism, simply because he had covered a government propaganda poster that had been unlawfully placed in a school playground, with a protest message and a drawing of a clown figure.



- From the outset, we have provided legal representation to five teachers who were dismissed from the Kölcsey High School in Budapest for standing up for free education and decent working conditions for teachers. After the Supreme Court (*Kúria*) ruled in 2025 that their arbitrary dismissal was lawful, we **helped** them petition the European Court of Human Rights to prove that they were victims of unlawful reprisals.



- Together with the Hungarian Trade Union Confederation, we have produced a plain-language **guide** on freedom of speech in the workplace. This handy, first-of-its-kind guide helps everyone understand how they can lawfully exercise their right to freedom of expression at work, whether their views concern public affairs or matters directly affecting the workplace.



We persisted in our efforts to ensure that anyone whose country is ravaged by war, or who flees torture or persecution, can access international protection. The HHC Refugee Programme provided free legal assistance to 1,021 people during the year. Around half of them sought protection from the war in Ukraine. For example:

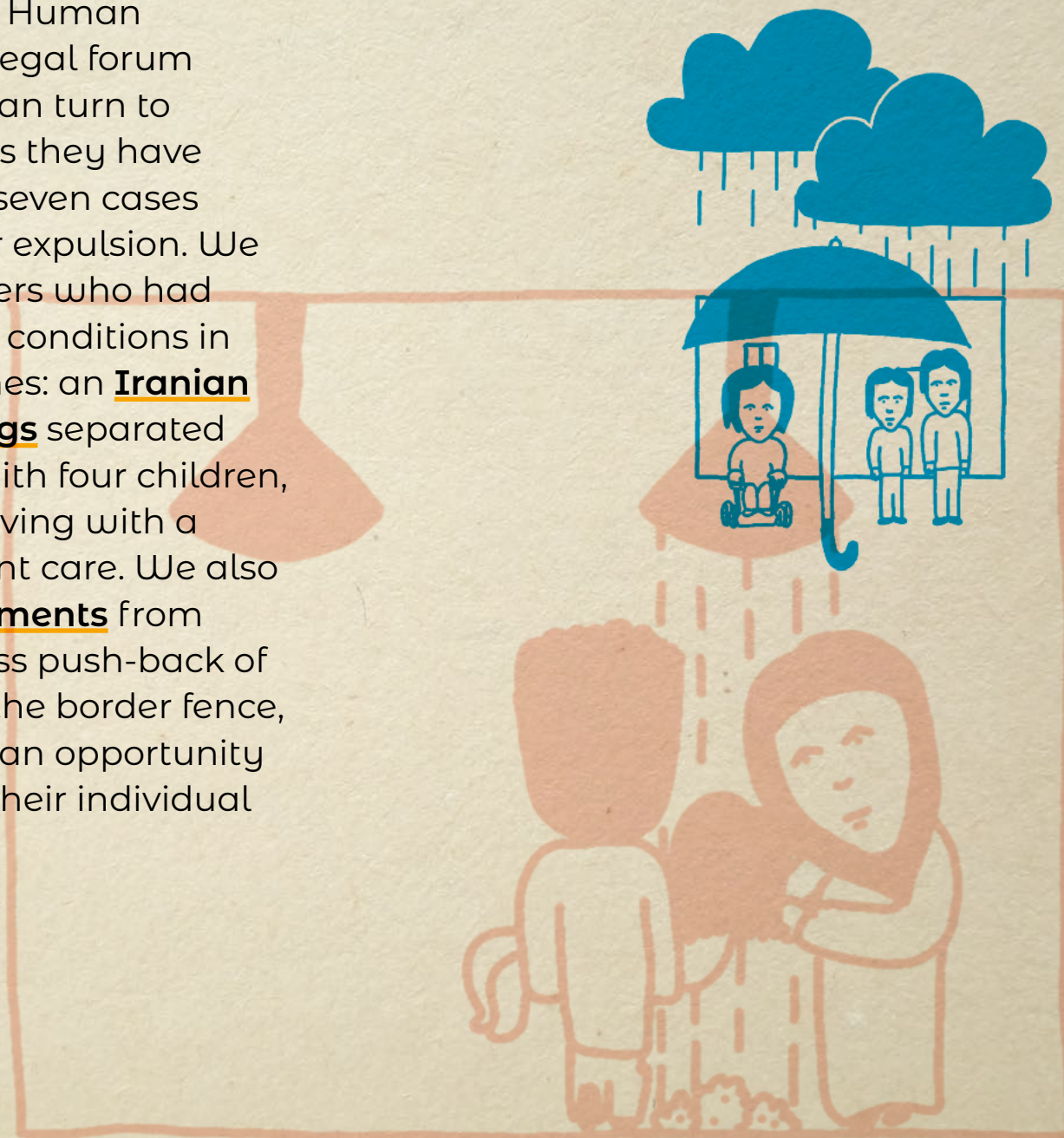
- Since Russia invaded Ukraine, we have been providing support by giving information, legal assistance and representation to refugees from Ukraine. By the end of 2025, we had helped more than 14,000 people.
- In 2024, the government withdrew housing support from families who had fled Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine from Hungary's neighbouring Transcarpathia region. The reduction in housing support exposed many families and children to the risk of homelessness. With our assistance and legal representation, the Budapest Court overturned the government commissioner's decisions in three cases involving 94 refugees and ordered a formal and reasoned decision in each case. 11 of our clients regained their right to accommodation in these proceedings, and we appealed the other decisions.



- Despite the fact that the government has made it virtually impossible even to submit asylum applications in Hungary, as a result of our persistent, often protracted litigation efforts, 29 of our asylum-seeker clients were granted protection (refugee status, subsidiary or temporary protection, or tolerated status) in 2025. Most of them were from Iran, Russia, Palestine or Cuba.



- Following the complete dismantling of the Hungarian asylum system, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) often remains the sole legal forum to which persons fleeing persecution can turn to assert their rights against the violations they have suffered in Hungary. In 2025, we won seven cases before the ECtHR relating to asylum or expulsion. We successfully represented asylum-seekers who had been unlawfully detained in inhuman conditions in Hungary's infamous former transit zones: an **Iranian refugee**, a **pair of Afghan minor siblings** separated from their family, an **Afghan family** with four children, and an **Iraqi family** with a daughter living with a serious disability and requiring constant care. We also succeeded in securing three new **judgments** from the ECtHR that ruled unlawful the mass push-back of asylum-seekers to the Serbian side of the border fence, without giving the persons concerned an opportunity to seek asylum in Hungary or having their individual circumstances examined.



We sustained our efforts to ensure the police carry out their duties without subjecting people to unwarranted harassment. During the year, we provided legal assistance and advice in 204 cases involving complaints about police conduct or other law enforcement matters. For example:

- Our attorney represented a **man** with no criminal record, whom the police had wrongfully suspected and humiliatingly taken into custody from his workplace, and about whom they had provided false and unauthorised information to the district council regarding the proceedings against him. Later, the district police chief also acknowledged that the arrest had been unlawful, and the court awarded our client one million forints in damages for the harm suffered and for the violation of his human dignity and reputation.



- Our attorney acted as the legal representation for László Takács, who had written messages on the back of traffic signs to protest the authorities' failure to repair the dilapidated road crossings in his town, which had caused constant traffic congestion for a year and a half. The legal action concerned the police conduct where Mr Takács was unnecessarily handcuffed during arrest, and his home was searched twice.



- As a part of a mediatised 'government crackdown on drugs' in the pre-election period, the police carried out a drug raid at a rave party held on an island on the Danube in August, during which 13 young people were detained, some with their hands handcuffed behind their backs in a humiliating and painful position. They were taken ashore in a rubber dinghy, but allegedly, they were not given life jackets, not even those who were handcuffed. We **represented** one of them in the complaints procedure and published a **complaint template**, which other victims can use in direct action against the rights violations suffered.
- During another drug raid at the Dojo Club in Budapest in November, the police subjected numerous young people to dubious medical tests, handcuffed them unlawfully, and prohibited them, also unlawfully, from recording the police action on their phones. We represent one of the people affected in the police complaints process, and assisted the others with **template complaint forms** to use in direct action against the violations of their rights.

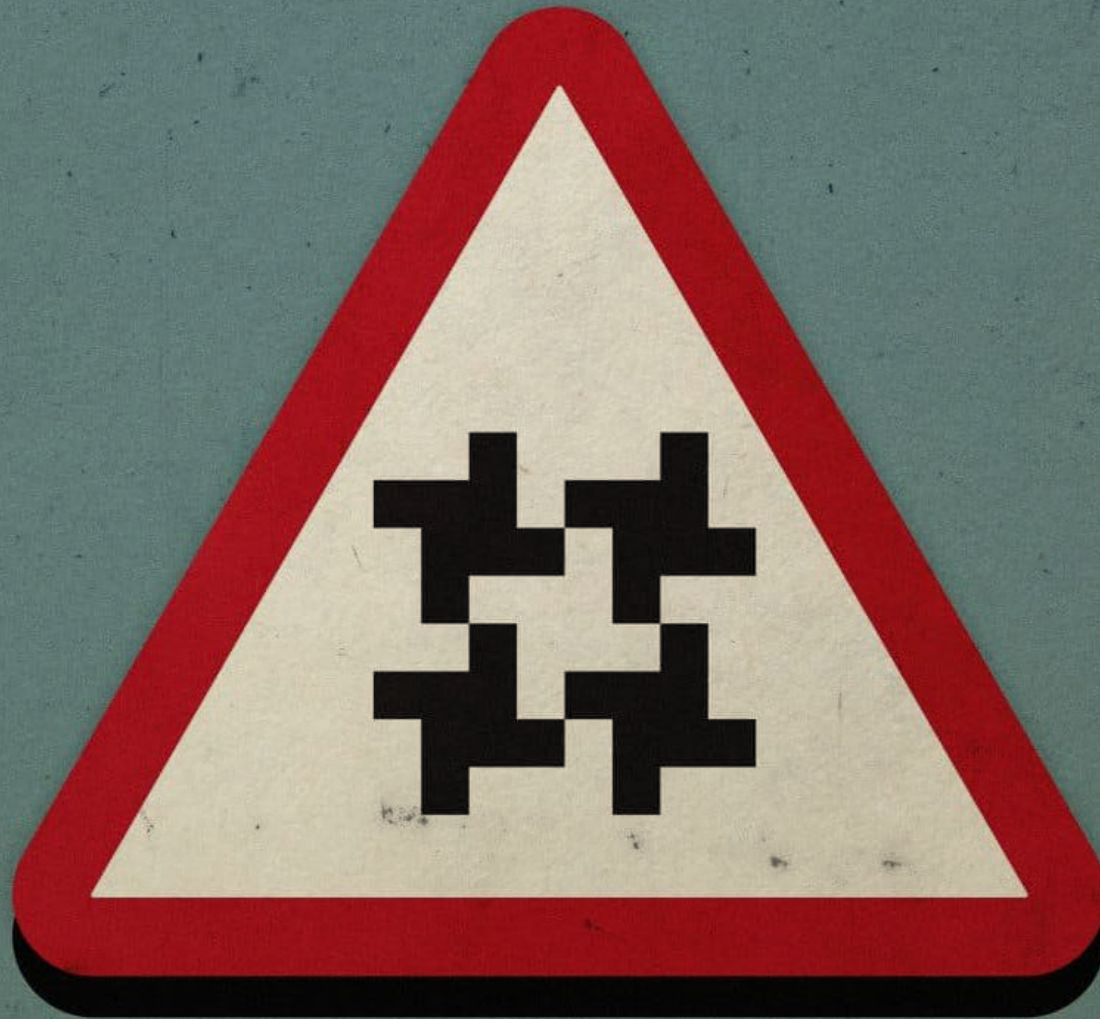


We continued advocating for prisoners' right to humane detention conditions – a prerequisite for meaningful reintegration after release. In 2025, our free legal assistance reached 527 people on detention-related issues. For example:

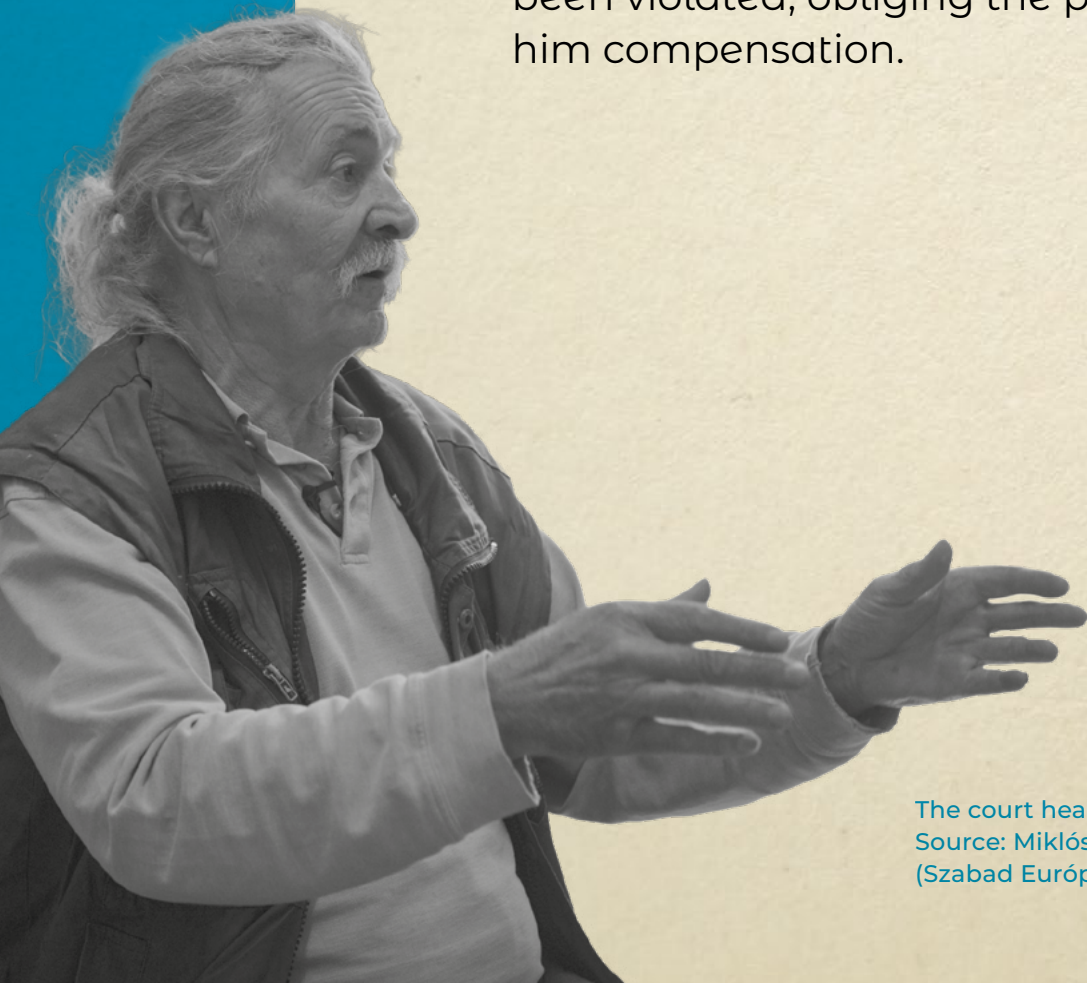
- For seven years, we persevered through research, litigation, public campaigns, international and domestic advocacy, and legal empowerment to ensure that contact between prisoners and their family members was not unreasonably and inhumanely restricted. Building on positive outcomes and limited changes of previous years, by March 2025, we achieved a landmark legislative change ensuring that prisoners are allowed to hug and kiss their partners and children, unless significant individual circumstances – such as security risks – justify an exception.



- We also secured a significant victory at the European Court of Human Rights, which **ruled** that preventing our former client from attending the funeral of his mother and sister was unlawful, especially considering his exemplary conduct in detention and that he had very little of his prison sentence left.



- We represented Gyula Richter, who had lost one of his legs due to peripheral artery disease, but nonetheless had been denied accessible accommodation during his detention. For example, he was forced to regularly use stairs without handrails and a shower without a grab rail, leaving him constantly dependent on the assistance of his cellmates. Mr Richter's case was successfully closed later in 2026, when the second-instance court also confirmed that his human dignity and right to equal treatment had been violated, obliging the penitentiary institution to pay him compensation.



The court hearing of Gyula Richter –
Source: Miklós Barna-Lipkovski
(Szabad Európa)



- We **launched** the 'Together for a Fresh Start' project in partnership with the Hazavárunk Foundation, the HHC-founded Support Network for Detainees and their Families (FÉCSKE) and the local authority of the 8th district of Budapest. This innovative collaboration supports family members who, despite having committed no crime, must endure the severe consequences of their loved one's imprisonment. It provides legal information, emotional support, and fosters a community of peers. By involving social and child welfare professionals, the project also contributes to the broader development of the local welfare system.



Through innovative communication work, we showed broad and diverse audiences how everyday lives are impacted when a government systematically undermines protections for human rights and the rule of law. For example:

- Even within the increasingly restricted space for free media, we remained a distinct and recognisable voice for human rights in Hungary. Our positions were presented in a positive or neutral light in the domestic media on more than 700 occasions in 2025.
- Our online reach also grew significantly, demonstrating to an ever-growing circle of Hungarians that even in an increasingly undemocratic environment, much can and should be done for human rights, the rule of law and helping those in need. On **Instagram**, for example, we doubled our followers (15,000 people by 31 December). Our **TikTok** presence also grew steadily throughout the year, with follower numbers increasing by 25%. Among the 70 videos published, the most successful ones reached between 40,000 and 85,000 users.

- The impact of our international advocacy efforts was measurable and significant. For instance, the resolution adopted by a large majority by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in September reinforced numerous longstanding concerns we have consistently voiced for years. In line with our recommendations, the resolution **called** on Hungary to shut down the Sovereignty Protection Office – established to intimidate independent civil society and voices critical of the government – to ensure the conditions for fair elections, and to abolish the special legal regime ('state of emergency') that has been unjustifiably maintained for a long time, granting the government excessively broad powers.



Through targeted training and legal empowerment, we worked to equip as many people as possible to take meaningful action in defence of human rights and democracy – in Hungary and beyond. For example:

- 1,260 people took part in various professional training courses, seminars and lectures delivered by our staff in 2025 in Hungary and various European countries. Topics covered were wide-ranging: fundamental rights in the EU, strategic litigation, criminology, the prevention of torture and the protection of its victims, evidence and credibility assessment in asylum procedures, statelessness, detainees' right to human dignity, victim support and access to classified information. Often, representatives of authorities and judges from many foreign countries have sought our expertise in addition to numerous civil society organisations and lawyers.



- Through professional development and solidarity actions, our Recharging Advocacy for Rights in Europe (**RARE**) initiative – run in partnership with the Hertie School in Berlin, the Netherlands Helsinki Committee, the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights in Poland and Oxfam Novib – has now grown into a vibrant professional community of 75 European human rights defenders.



- We ran two human rights courses for young Hungarians, migrants and refugees to help them become active and informed members of their communities and Hungarian society, and to enable them to stand up more effectively for their own and others' human rights. The autumn course ended with an innovative **Forum Theatre** performance on International Human Rights Day, which addressed the problems faced by refugees and foreigners living in Hungary. The audience also included municipal authorities' staff from the 8th district of Budapest.



- In February, we published the handbook 'Human Rights Defenders of the Future', aimed to bring legal advocacy work closer to young people and teachers, helping not only to raise their human rights awareness but also to nurture the next generation of human rights professionals and activists.



Support our work so that we can continue to stand up for those who have been wronged and be a bulwark against arbitrariness!

Every donation helps us to effectively defend human rights and the rule of law.



helsinki.hu/en/donate/



Address

1242 Budapest, Pf. 317.

Telephone

+36 70 772 8175, 70 323 5847

Website

helsinki.hu/en

Blog

helsinkifigyelo.444.hu

E-mail

helsinki@helsinki.hu

Instagram

magyar_helsinki_bizottsag

[instagram.com/magyar_helsinki_bizottsag](https://www.instagram.com/magyar_helsinki_bizottsag)

Facebook

helsinkibizottsag

[facebook.com/helsinkibizottsag](https://www.facebook.com/helsinkibizottsag)

TikTok

@helsinkibizottsag

[tiktok.com/@helsinkibizottsag](https://www.tiktok.com/@helsinkibizottsag)

YouTube

HelsinkiBizottsag

[youtube.com/user/HelsinkiBizottsag](https://www.youtube.com/user/HelsinkiBizottsag)

X (Twitter)

hhc_helsinki

twitter.com/hhc_helsinki

LinkedIn

hungarian-helsinki-committee

[linkedin.com/company/hungarian-helsinki-committee](https://www.linkedin.com/company/hungarian-helsinki-committee)