



Hungary is about to criminalise homelessness once again

By passing a new law that would criminalize street homelessness, the Hungarian government is once again about to violate the fundamental right to human dignity, defy the country's international obligations, and go directly in the face of the judgement of Hungarian Constitutional Court.

The Minister of Interior proposed the modification of the Act on Petty Offences in April 2013 to allow local municipalities to penalize the use of public spaces for habitation in order to preserve public order, public safety, public health and cultural values. The law would also penalize the building of huts/shacks without permission. The parliamentary debate of the proposal started this week, and the final vote will most probably take place on September 23 or 24, 2013.

The City is for All is once again standing up against the government's latest attempt to criminalize street homelessness without providing any meaningful alternatives for dignified housing. If the proposal is passed, thousands of people who are currently forced to live in public spaces could be criminally persecuted or would be forced out of "prohibited areas". The mayor of Budapest has already announced the creation of such "zones of prohibition" covering most of the downtown area of the capital.

Today, the number of homeless people in Hungary far exceeds the capacity of homeless shelters. Besides, existing shelters are mostly overcrowded, and offer rather undignified living conditions. It is very difficult for people to break out of the cycle of poverty and homelessness, since the availability of social housing is very limited. In addition, financial support for housing is very low. The passing of this proposal would mean that many of the most vulnerable Hungarians would have to go into hiding from authorities. As a result, it will be much more difficult for social workers to reach them, which is especially troubling with the winter months approaching.

It is important to point out that a very similar law had already been introduced by the Hungarian government in November 2011. At that time, the criminalization of homelessness sparked public outrage both in Hungary and abroad. For example, the UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing and the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty issued a [joint statement](#) calling on the Hungarian government to provide "roofs, not handcuffs" for homeless people.

In November 2012, the Hungarian Constitutional Court annulled this law, arguing that the criminalization of a social status violated the right to human dignity. The Court also stated that "[h]omelessness is a social problem, which shall be dealt with by the state with means of social services, instead of punishment." The current proposal was made possible by the 4th modification of the Hungarian Constitution, which overrode the Constitutional Court's 2012 decision.

The City is for All has called on the members of Parliament to vote against the new law, and is urging the government to focus on sustainable and long-term solutions to homelessness through social and housing means instead of the criminal persecution of homeless people.

In the attachment, you can find a detailed history of the criminalization of homelessness between 2010 and 2013.

Note to editors: The City is for All is a group of homeless people and their allies who fight for the rights of homeless people and to end homelessness. **More information:** www.avarosmindenkie.blog.hu

Contact: Bernadett Sebály +3670-217-2641, avarosmindenkie@gmail.com