

National Parliamentary Elections in Hungary in April 2010



How can homeless people take part?

Hungary will hold its next parliamentary elections in April 2010. Homeless services and activists try to make sure that homeless people can exercise their political rights as much as other citizens and will take part in choosing the next parliament.

A Város Mindenkié (AVM - The City belongs to everyone!), a grassroots organization in Budapest, whose members are people who are currently homeless, with a past experience of homelessness or who want to make sure that Budapest belongs to every citizen, are taking action on various levels.

They (as well as other prominent NGO Menhely – Shelter Foundation¹) have prepared a guide to homeless people and helping professionals explaining how people with various *administrative barriers* can take part in the elections: what to do if someone is not living at their official registered address? how to get registered for someone with no fixed above? what is the right procedure for people whose registered address is a public place, or a district? how can handicapped/immobile people vote?

Homeless and non-homeless activists *visit services* for the homeless where they explain people about their rights, as well as try to *encourage* them to make a statement and want to take part in the national elections. Although there is no official data, it is suspected that homeless people generally do not exercise their right to vote, as they often feel that no political party is paying attention to their problems.

Partly as a response to this impression, the organization has sent 5+1 *questions to all political parties* running in the parliamentary elections, asking about their plans and ideas regarding issues of housing and some problems homeless people face:

1. Does your party plan to increase the housing stock owned by the state/municipality, or do you want to further their privatization?
 2. What are your plans regarding the system of rent support and how do you plan to help people with mortgage arrears?
 3. What is your plan about segregated neighbourhoods, where a significant proportion of residents is living in extreme poverty?
 4. Would you support a one-year suspension of all evictions where no further accommodation is offered to those evicted?
 5. Do you think the current system of services for the homeless needs to be reformed? If yes, how?
- +1. Do you support the right to housing being included in the Constitution during the next four years of parliament? Do you think the Hungarian Parliament should sign the 31st article of the Revised European Social Charter?

The responses shall be published on the website of AVM (<http://avarosmindenkie.blog.hu>)

¹ www.menhely.hu

AVM has also submitted *an appeal* to Dr. Máté Szabó, *the Hungarian Parliamentary Commissioner of Civil Rights*², pointing out restrictions that might hinder the full participation of some homeless individuals in the voting process. Currently, only people with a local registered address can vote, while many homeless people have addresses like “Budapest”, no address at all, or “No address” as their official address. AVM is helping the inquest of the Commissioner by gathering evidence from such address-cards from homeless people and the services they use.

² Dr. Szabó has paid close attention to the rights of homeless people during his service, so much so that in 2009 he was given the national prize „For Homeless People”. He carried out a thorough investigation addressing various issues homeless people face in 2007-2008. The result were published in Hungarian in 2009, an English summary can be read in the FEANTSA Flash November-December 2009, under publications: http://www.feantsa.org/files/freshstart/Communications/Flash%20EN/Docs_relating_to_Flash_2009/December/Hungarian%20ombudsman%20Homeless%20study%202008%20%282%29.pdf