



World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples - Hungary

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Minorities and indigenous peoples

Main minority and indigenous communities: According to the results of the 2011 census, out of a total population of more than 9.9 million, minorities included Roma (3.2 per cent), Germans (1.9 per cent), Slovaks (0.4 per cent), Romanians (0.4 per cent), Croats (0.3 per cent) as well as Serbs, Ukrainians, Poles, Bulgarians, Ruthenians, Armenians and Slovenes.

Main languages: Hungarian, Romani, German, Slovak

Main religions: Roman Catholicism, Protestantism (Lutheran and Calvinist), Eastern Orthodox Christianity and Judaism

The population of all Hungary's nationalities, except Slovenes, have risen considerably since the last census in 2001. Various estimates put the number of Roma who are dispersed throughout the country at significantly larger than the official figure: between 250,000 and 800,000 (amounting to 5 to 10 per cent of the entire population). Most of them reside in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County and in the neighbouring Szabolcs Szatmár Bereg County in north-eastern Hungary. Germans are widely dispersed throughout the western part of the country and their declared numbers have more than doubled since the 2001 census. Romanians are concentrated mainly in the eastern part of the country. Slovaks live in the north of the country and near the Romanian border, whilst Croats and Serbs are mostly settled in the south. Hungary has a growing immigrant population, dominated by numerous Chinese. Hungary's Jewish population, living mainly in Budapest, numbers according to some estimates between 35,000 and 120,000.

According to the 2011 census, only 5,579 people consider themselves Muslim in the country. In 2016 close to 30,000 people applied for asylum, though the rejection rate is currently more than 90 per cent. Most applicants came from Afghanistan, Syria, Pakistan, Iraq and Iran.

Current issues

Hungary's minorities, particularly its Roma and Jewish populations, have long suffered discrimination, hate speech and even targeted violence. These problems have showed little sign of abating in the context of a deepening economic crisis, rising unemployment and growing nationalism that has seen the country's politics shift sharply towards the right.

The Roma community in Hungary, by far the largest minority ethnic community in the country, continues to suffer profound social and economic marginalization, including higher levels of poverty and unemployment, and is also a prime target of ethnically motivated attacks. Hungary's Roma have been scapegoated and demonized in right-wing discourse. In particular, anti-Roma rhetoric has been used by the ultra-nationalist Jobbik party in campaigning for national and European parliamentary elections, but has also been adopted by mainstream political organizations such as the ruling Fidesz party.

Hungary's Jewish population -- the largest in eastern Central Europe, based primarily in the capital Budapest -- also faces increasing levels of hostility, particularly with the rise of the far right. Anti-Semitism is commonplace and is a visible element of right-wing ideology in Hungary, where it has been revived through myths of a Jewish economic 'conspiracy'. According to the Action and Protection Foundation there were 52 anti-Semitic incidents in 2015, among which were two assaults and 43 cases of hate speech. While this figure was higher than the year before, it represented a decline since 2013.

Since then, the onset of the European refugee crisis has hardened xenophobic attitudes towards refugees and migrants, encouraged by the extremist rhetoric from Jobbik as well as the government itself. A national referendum, initiated by the government, was held in October 2016 concerning the EU relocation plan requiring Hungary to accept 1,294 asylum seekers. Though voter turnout was too low for the results of the referendum to be validated, a very large majority -- 98 per cent of those who voted -- opted for the rejection of the EU's quotas. The government's anti-refugee rhetoric has been amplified by pro-government media outlets that have repeatedly depicted asylum seekers as criminals or terrorists. This has taken place against a heightened climate of government repression of political opposition and dissent.

Many Hungarian and international civil society organizations expressed their concern about new changes in the country's asylum and migration laws, which were adopted in March 2017. The amendments would allow for the automatic detention of asylum seekers in transit zones and summary removal to the Serbian border without allowing them access to the Hungarian asylum procedure.

Most recently, the government issued a draft law which will target foreign-funded civil society organizations in the country, on the pretext that even limited amounts of overseas funding to NGOs would undermine Hungary's sovereignty and promote 'illegal' immigration. However, the law threatens the future operation of international, regional and national human rights organizations, and thus would weaken minority rights protection as well. It is widely interpreted as a move by the government to stifle political opposition and criticism from human rights groups. The parliament approved the law in June 2017, despite vigorous public protests.

Background

Environment

Hungary is bordered by Slovakia to the north, Romania and Ukraine to the east, Austria and Slovenia to the west, and Croatia and Serbia to the south. The eastern part of Hungary consists mainly of open plain; west of the Danube the countryside is hillier.

History

The Hungarians, who speak a Finno-Ugric language, entered the territory of present-day Hungary in the late ninth century. During the Middle Ages, the Hungarians established a kingdom which included Transylvania, Vojvodina, present-day Slovakia, and sub-Carpathian Ukraine. After 1526, Hungary was incorporated within the Habsburg Empire of which it remained a part until 1867 when it became a dual monarchy. This dissolved in 1918. The historic Hungarian state had a strongly multi-ethnic character. Only about a half of its population were ethnic Hungarians, the remainder being principally Croats, Germans, Jews, Roma, Romanians, Serbs and Slovaks.

With the Treaty of Trianon (1920), two-thirds of Hungary was apportioned to neighbouring states, leaving Hungary with a largely homogeneous ethnic population. During the inter-war period, Hungary practised a policy of assimilation with regard to its remaining minorities. Most official documents and signposts were written only in Hungarian and the Hungarian language constituted the sole vehicle of education in state schools.

During the Second World War, tens of thousands of Roma and about 600,000 Jews were deported and murdered. Thousands more Jews emigrated after the war to Israel and the United States. Between 1945 and 1948, forcible resettlement and population exchange resulted in the expulsion of about 70,000 Slovaks and 200,000 Germans. For those members of minorities who remained, the Hungarian government instituted education in the mother tongue and authorized the introduction of bilingual signposts in areas of minority settlement.

During the 1950s, however, the policy reversed as minority organizations were considered 'atoms of pluralism'. The teaching of Hungarian was increased in minority schools, cultural groups went into sharp decline, and no opportunity was permitted for dealing with the authorities in any language other than Hungarian. The policy of assimilation persisted until the 1970s when minority language education, at both elementary and secondary level, was promoted.

During the late 1980s, there was a marked increase in the number of minority organizations and a Secretariat (after 1990, Office) of National and Ethnic Minorities was established within the Ministerial Council to coordinate and oversee policy. Free elections, held in Hungary in 1990, led to the formation of a conservative coalition government. The new government was much concerned with the plight of Hungarian minorities abroad, principally in Romania. As part of its attempt to secure enhanced international standards of rights protection for minorities, the government actively championed the rights of minorities within Hungary itself.

Though Hungary joined the EU in 2004, the ensuing years were marked by economic difficulties as the global financial crisis of 2008 hit Europe: this financial hardship, combined with a strong general dissatisfaction with the government, enabled right-wing parties to rise to power in the country. In 2010 the conservative Fidesz party won the parliamentary election, gaining a two-thirds majority. The ultra-nationalist Jobbik, or 'Movement for a Better Hungary', entered parliament for the first time.

This period was also accompanied by a series of legislative changes that many saw as undermining civil society activism and basic freedoms. In 2011 parliament enacted a new Constitution, 'The Fundamental Law of Hungary', which was criticized by many for threatening democracy and weakening the system of checks and balances. The passing of the new Constitution was followed by six amendments up until the end of 2016 and by other controversial new legislation. In the 2014 parliamentary elections Fidesz once again gained a two-thirds

majority, though with the far-right Jobbik gaining ground. Jobbik's strongly anti-Roma and anti-Semitic rhetoric brought the party success in the 2014 elections, with its share of the national vote rising to over 20 per cent. But just as troubling is the shift towards the right of the country's political mainstream, particularly Fidesz, reinforced by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's increasingly ethno-nationalist rhetoric.

Governance

Hungary adopted the new Constitution of Hungary in 2011, known as the Fundamental Law. The government also established a unified ombudsman, the mandate of which includes the protection of the rights of nationalities living in Hungary. The Fundamental Law mentions national minorities in several places (including in the preamble, in the general anti-discrimination clause of Article XV (2) and in Article XXIX). The Act on the Rights of Nationalities of Hungary was enacted in the same year. Replacing the Act on National and Ethnic Minorities of 1993, it recognizes 13 nationalities (Bulgarian, Greek, Croatian, Polish, German, Armenian, Roma, Romanian, Ruthenian, Serbian, Slovak, Slovene and Ukrainian) and provides them with both individual and collective rights. A condition for recognition is that the relevant minority has to have been present in Hungary for at least a century.

All recognized minorities are entitled to establish nationality self-governments with wide functional and financial autonomy, focusing primarily on educational and cultural affairs. Local self-government elections are only possible where a nationality has a significant presence and are held every five years at the same time as the general election of local government representatives and mayors. However, the Venice Commission has criticized the complexity of these procedural regulations and suggested that they can sometimes undermine the autonomy of nationality self-governments.

Participation of minority communities in national politics has historically been a significant challenge, with Roma parties struggling to gain sufficient votes to qualify for national elections. As a result, some have tried to achieve political representation through membership in mainstream parties. In recent years, a number of other measures have been taken to boost participation, including preferential quotas to ensure representatives from all 13 national minorities are represented in the National Assembly, though some of these have also attracted criticism. The creation of a so-called 'national registry' of voters identifying as minorities, designed to allow national self-governments to have candidates run in general elections, has also faced criticism for forcing minorities into segregated communal politics as those who identify themselves as minorities are then obliged to choose among community representatives as opposed to mainstream political candidates.

The Equal Treatment Authority, an autonomous, independent quasi-judicial body, was established in 2005 to combat racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and intolerance at the national level. It has the power to adopt legally binding decisions concerning violations of the Act on Equal Treatment and Promotion of Equal Opportunities.

Updated January 2018

Minorities

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- [Roma](#)
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Contacts

Minority based and advocacy organizations

General

Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights (Ombudsman)

Website: <https://www.ajbh.hu/en/web/ajbh-en>

Hungarian Helsinki Committee

Website: www.helsinki.hu

Minority Rights Group Europe

Equal Treatment Authority

Website: <http://www.egyenlobanasmod.hu/eng>

Legal Defence Bureau for National and Ethnic Minorities

Website: www.neki.hu

Hungarian Civil Liberties Union

Website: www.tasz.hu

Research Institute of Ethnic and National Minorities

Hungarian Academy of Sciences

Website: <http://kisebbssegkutato.tk.mta.hu/en/about-the-institute>

Tom Lantos Institute

Website: <http://www.tomlantosinstitute.hu/>

Hungarian Europe Society

Website: <http://www.europatarsasag.hu/en>

Roma

Autonomia Foundation

Website: <http://autonomia.hu/en>

European Roma Rights Centre

Website: www.errc.org

Chance for Children Foundation

Website: <http://www.cfcf.hu/>

Romedia Foundation

Website: <http://en.romediafoundation.org/>

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