Crime Prevention in Hungary and the role of National Crime Prevention Centre

1. What are the number, structure and competences of local authorities in Hungary? How are they elected?  

Administrative structure: Hungary’s administrative structure, set by a 1990 law, is based on the French model. Hungary comprises 252 cities, 2,883 communes, including 2,800 with less than 5,000 inhabitants and 19 counties in addition to the capital.

A two-tiers system of local government in Hungary is represented by municipalities with its own elected representative body at the local level and county governments at the regional level. Counties are not superior authorities to municipalities.

Local authorities have a wide responsibility to provide services. There are two main categories of tasks: mandatory and optional. The mandatory category comprises those tasks concerning local affairs and delegated tasks. The municipalities are responsible for the provision of most local services, including street-lighting, kindergartens and elementary schools, housing and a wide range of public buildings. The counties are responsible for schools other than elementary, universities, hospitals and retirement homes. Counties also have the task of co-ordinating environmental policy.

The tasks of the local government are carried out by the representative body (council) and its organs: the mayor, the committees of the council and the office of the council. The members of the council are elected for a term of four years.

The way the mayor is elected depends upon the size of the municipality. In municipalities with up to 10,000 inhabitants, the mayor is elected directly by the citizens. In municipalities with over 10,000 inhabitants, the mayor is elected by the municipal council. The mayor can not be recalled during his election term.

Although there is a considerable decentralisation of power in Hungary, local authorities’ finances are heavily dependent on allocations from central state budget. Two-thirds of the spending power of municipalities comes from central government.

2. What is the national context in Hungary: main strategies and policies initiated as regards crime prevention?

Surface: 93,030 km²
Population: 10,097,000
Foreigners: 0.3%

1 Information obtained from UNPAN website: www.unpan.org United Nations Online Network in Public Administration and Finance.

Unemployment rate: 14.4%

Criminality rates in Hungary and their variation during the last five years:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offences</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Against property</td>
<td>69,1</td>
<td>68,2</td>
<td>67,4</td>
<td>66,7</td>
<td>62,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against public order</td>
<td>16,9</td>
<td>16,0</td>
<td>16,7</td>
<td>17,3</td>
<td>19,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violation of traffic rules</td>
<td>4,3</td>
<td>4,2</td>
<td>5,1</td>
<td>4,8</td>
<td>5,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against the person</td>
<td>3,6</td>
<td>4,4</td>
<td>4,0</td>
<td>4,3</td>
<td>4,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against the economy</td>
<td>2,4</td>
<td>2,7</td>
<td>3,4</td>
<td>3,6</td>
<td>3,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of offences</td>
<td>450672</td>
<td>465694</td>
<td>420782</td>
<td>413343</td>
<td>418883</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Hungary criminality is identified by:
- Central Bureau of Statistics
- Unified Statistics for Police & Prosecution /responsible: The Chief Prosecutor/

Method: survey and collection of data on criminal procedures, the police and the judicial system.

Overall, north-eastern part of Hungary is more hit by delinquency. The feeling of safety and security is better in the rural areas than in the cities. However, the real situation of public order is nearly the same.

A diagnosis on the feeling of insecurity is prepared each year on the basis of the previous year’s analyses on the crime situation on national and regional levels. County centres and main towns do the same. The main findings of such analyses are used in the setting up of regional and local crime prevention strategies and action plans.

Evaluation of activities in the field of security is done each year in the form of annual reports prepared by the local police. They are subsequently discussed and accepted by the Board of Local Governments and published so that local communities can be informed of the current situation.

Priorities in the field of urban safety include:

- enhancement of public safety and security
- reduction of vehicle thefts, robberies and burglaries
- reduction of offences committed in public areas
- reduction of environmental pollution
- solving the problems of the unemployed and homeless

Hungary is giving high priority to crime prevention, especially—in line with EU priorities—to the prevention of organized crime with focus on cross-border crimes involving Central and Eastern European countries on known smuggling routes in the region. In accordance with this aim, a comprehensive review of the state of affairs in crime prevention started in 2000. Based on the conclusions drawn from this process, the Hungarian Ministry of Interior drafted a proposal on a new Crime Prevention Strategy including local community and law enforcement related crime prevention issues. At the same time a Bill on
the international cooperation of law enforcement agencies has been elaborated, which was adopted by the Parliament in 2002.

In 2003, the National Strategy of Social Prevention of Crime was adopted with four priorities: prevention of criminality of children and young offenders, developing urban security, prevention of domestic violence, prevention of victimisation, assistance to victims, compensation, and prevention of repeated crimes.

The document outlining the strategy specifically makes the important point that criminal justice should not be seen as subordinated to social crime prevention. Social crime prevention is supplementary to the administration of criminal justice. The crime reduction impact of criminal justice can be greatly reinforced if adequate crime prevention mechanisms are in place. Crime prevention cannot replace criminal justice.

The Hungarian authors of the strategy document regard community-based crime prevention as a special way to organize the implementation of crime prevention rather than as a separate substantive category. The Hungarian document furthermore points out that general employment and health policies have important crime preventive side-effects, but cannot be regarded as crime prevention. These are social policies in their own right. Three main types of crime prevention remain: early intervention, situational crime prevention, as well as victim support and reintegration of offenders.

3. Is there any national agency in charge of the crime prevention issues?

The first stage in establishing the crime prevention body was the settlement of the National Crime Prevention Council by the Government in 1995. It was the body in charge of providing views and suggestions to assist the Government in its efforts to reduce crime. The key role of the Council was the establishment of the National Crime Prevention Programme.

In parallel with the implementation of a crime prevention programme the government called for its coordination with the social policy in specific areas so as to build on each other.

In order to ensure the broader participation of society in the field of crime prevention, the National Crime Prevention Council underwent restructuring. The government decree of 2003 gave the responsibility of determining the managerial and administrative tasks of the National Crime Prevention Council to the National Crime Prevention Centre established within the Ministry of Interior. With the setting up of the centre, continuity of crime prevention guidelines at a ministerial level was to be ensured.

A National Crime Prevention Centre (NCPC) (see question 6)

4. What is the local context (local policies/strategies/programmes developed in the framework of the national strategy)?

According to paragraph (1) of article 8 of Act LXV of 1990 on self-government states, local governments should themselves stipulate the requisite tasks relating to public security. Nonetheless, in most towns and villages there has been no setting up of public security and
crime prevention committees. Finding a “solution” to the question of local security has been reduced to formulating the slogan “more police on the streets”.  

The National Strategy for Social Crime Prevention stipulates that municipalities must, in cooperation with the local police, play an active and leading role in developing plans for local community security. The responsibilities for municipalities in this field are diverse and include:

- organising local early warning systems,
- organising the most diverse forms for cooperation,
- coordination of local crime prevention programmes and their appraisal,
- motivation of self-organisation of local professionals and the public
- disseminating information and public security-related data,
- mediating between services available in the area and local public security needs.

In practice, local governments offer financial support to the local police without assuming further responsibility. Few local authorities have set up victim support bureaux. Local governments (regardless of their competencies) are obliged to offer financial support, shelter and meal for those in existential need. Child welfare services and family assistance centres are run by local governments, which may co-operate with the police, the Public Prosecutor Offices, judiciary and different civic organisations.

5. What are the partners with whom local authorities cooperate in the area of crime prevention?

The National Strategy for Social Crime Prevention recognises the “bottom-up” approach as one of the fundamental principles of partnership and underlines the necessity for the police to improve local public security.

Consequently, the main structures of partnership in the field of security include: Representatives of the police, local and regional governments, NGOs and other actors and stakeholders of crime prevention are members of local and regional public security and crime prevention committees. These bodies are independent, but they co-operate with each other, exchange information, work methods, best practices, etc. Government bodies, e.g. National Crime Prevention Centre, National Crime Prevention Committee, assist them. The National Civil Guard Association, nationwide association of volunteers interested in the provision of local safety and security, is their main supporter beside the police.

The main institutions and bodies cooperate in the following areas:

The police: public safety and security, crime prevention
The border guards + Immigration authority: illegal migration and employment
Local authorities: main co-ordinator, responsible in all fields of local safety and security as well as crime prevention
Local prosecution & justice bodies: jurisdictions, rehabilitation, mediation, follow up of former convicts.

4 Data provided by Mr. Janos Kormos, National Crime Prevention Centre, Ministry of Interior, Hungary.
National Civil Guard Association (volunteers): assistance in the provision of public safety and general crime prevention
NGOs: support in various fields (on street level, with social workers, victim assistance, etc.)

Apart from the police, the most important actors in local crime prevention identified by the strategy include: Neighbourhood Watch organisations, national civil guards, private detectives, self-governments of ethnic minority, teachers, GPs, social workers, family helpers and workers involved in alcohol and drug prevention and many others.

Certain NGOs have developed an awareness of the importance of crime prevention. At the turn of the 1990s a number of “civil guard” organisations were set up. There are around 600 NGOs existing today. One third of them operates as associations and has the National Civil Guard Federation as the national, voluntary organisation that safeguards their interests.\(^5\)

6. Crime prevention and the role of the National Crime Prevention Centre: policies and strategies developed, examples of practices?

The National Crime Prevention Centre has been established within the Ministry of Interior for the coordination of crime prevention activities of all law enforcement agencies and governments on national and international level. The centre is supervising the local and regional law enforcement crime prevention units and acts as one of the national liaisons with the EU.

The NCPC is currently working, in cooperation with Coordination Centre against Organized Crime, on a comprehensive national law enforcement crime prevention action plan to prevent organized crime. Also, it is the task of NCPC to form an autonomous Crime Prevention Academy out of the existing network of law enforcement training institutions by the end of 2003. This has developed into the establishment of a Regional Crime Prevention Academy in Budapest. Its activity is collecting and providing international methodological collections, expertise in research, educational materials, publications and international training. It is aiming a central role in providing training to professionals in Central-East Europe, in particular on combating trafficking in human beings, smuggling of human beings, trafficking in drugs, etc.

\(^5\) After Prof. Dr Lenke Fehér, « Trafficking in Human Beings in Hungary », the OSCE Challanged, International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights.