

The **City is for All**, Hungarian grassroots organization founded by homeless and formerly homeless activists and their allies who fight for a society based on equality and justice. The world is increasingly concerned with democracy being jeopardized in Hungary, however, one severe issue tend not to receive enough media coverage and international attention: the criminalisation of homelessness and homeless people. Since the current government of Viktor Orbán was elected, a systematic campaign has been going on to criminalize homeless people and get them out of sight as quickly as possible in Budapest and other cities in Hungary.

Last autumn the Parliament adopted a legal [amendment](#), which defines the functions of public places in an enumerate manner and allows the municipalities to create a criminal offence for the use of public places if the use is not in line with the defined functions. The justification of the amendment explicitly revealed the government's real purpose, namely charging homeless people for sleeping in public places and using them "not in line with their functions". The City is for All was actively campaigning against the amendment: we held a demonstration, [called for international solidarity](#), ran a petition campaign; the FEANTSA (European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless) released a statement, and even political parties opposed the proposal. But all in vain, the amendment easily passed the Parliament under total government control.

Before the amendment came into force the mayor of Budapest, Istvan Tarlos [announced](#) his project to "clear" the inner city of Budapest (mostly of homeless people). As a result he swept homeless people out of underground stations (functioning as the last resort for many rough sleepers), and at the same time [terminated](#) the contract with those NGOs involved in services provided for homeless people. Our group held a whole-night [demonstration](#) at a central underground station, where a large number of citizens voiced their solidarity with homeless people.

The Budapest mayor was also the first to introduce a decree on the "non-conform use of public places" and defined "residing habitually in public places" as criminal offense. It means that people who live or have their belongings in public places can be charged with a fine up to 50.000 HUF, found essentially unconstitutional by the ombudsperson. Our group has taken a series of actions to hinder the decree entering into force: we filed a motion to the Constitutional Court, voiced our concerns at the Budapest Municipal Assembly, met Mr. Tarlos to discuss the consequences of his proposal, and since none of these strategies worked we practiced civil disobedience to thwart the Assembly passing the decree. The FEANTSA has released a [statement](#) again, but none of these actions had any result. Hitherto hundreds of homeless people have been subjected to short-term arrest on the grounds of the decree, and the authorities have destroyed dozens of self-made shacks all over the city.

Soon afterwards some MEPs [submitted](#) a proposal according to which if someone is caught second time in 6 months "residing habitually in public places", s/he can be charged with imprisonment or a fine up to 150.000 HUF. The proposal was passed on 14 November 2011, despite the fierce opposition of various social actors. The City is for All organized a [demonstration](#) in front of the Parliament, which was attended by 500-1000 people; we [called for actions](#) of international solidarity resulting in statements and events reflecting on the Hungarian situation all over the world; we held a [spectacular performance](#) opposing the amendment, while a group of citizens started a spontaneous sit-in in the office of one of the MEPs proposing the amendment, that ended up in the arrest of the disobeying activists.

At the same time the mayor of the 8th district of Budapest has passed [regulations](#) that outlaw "residing habitually in public places" (despite the fact that the decree of Tarlos covers the whole city), silent begging and dumpster diving. Claiming that "if we don't expel homeless people, they will expel citizens of the district", he proposed a token referendum about these regulations. Despite the fact that the turnout was only 15% the regulations entered into force. Moreover, local major Mate Kocsis set up a special police unit to seek for people breaching public space regulations as well as a short-term-arrest office, where hundreds of homeless people have already been subjected to short-term-arrest.

The City is for All, along with local and international NGOs has tried to oppose the current wave of exclusionary and criminalising regulations by all possible peaceful means, with no significant result. Therefore we now focus our actions on international bodies and institutions. The [resolution by the European Parliament](#) reminds us that the exclusion and criminalisation of homeless people is an alarming issue not only in Hungary, but everywhere in the European Union. Hereby we call the international community and especially the EU to take action against the criminalization and incarceration of homeless people in Hungary.