

BRIEF 1

**Empowering Voices: Participation in
Budapest's Homelessness Strategy**
Municipality of Budapest
Budapest, Hungary

ID CARD



PROJECT TITLE.

Empowering Voices: Participation in Budapest's Homelessness Strategy

MAIN OBJECTIVE.

To include the opinions and experiences of people with lived experience of homelessness in the participatory creation of Budapest's municipal homelessness strategy.

TARGET AUDIENCE.

People with lived experience of homelessness, both those currently experiencing homelessness and those with past experience.

IN NUMBERS.

221

individuals with firsthand experience of homelessness included in the participatory strategy design.

13

forums held for individuals to provide their input.

25

individuals with firsthand experience of homelessness included in the Council of Experts by Experience

SUMMARY.

"Home for everyone", Budapest's new ten-year strategy on homelessness, adopted in 2022, attempts to facilitate a paradigm shift in homeless policy. To ensure meaningful involvement of those most affected, the municipality built the strategy around a multi-layered participatory process, prioritising the genuine engagement of people with lived experience of homelessness over tokenistic approaches.



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Municipality of Budapest

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Project description

Home for Everyone: A Ten-Year Participatory Strategy

“Home for Everyone” is a ten-year plan aiming to reorient homelessness policy towards the provision of affordable housing. The strategy-making process strongly emphasised the inclusion of people with firsthand experience of homelessness. A participatory process engaged 221 individuals through 13 well-publicised forums held in overnight shelters, temporary hostels, family homes, day centres, and one forum among formerly homeless tenants of the Municipality. Additionally, a Council of Experts by Experience was created, composed of 25 formerly homeless individuals, selected via a well-advertised open call to ensure representation across age, gender, and educational background.

The Council took part in interactive workshops co-facilitated by two experienced, formerly homeless activists. Members shared their insights, formulated expectations, gave feedback on the preliminary draft of the strategy, expressed their views directly to the Mayor, and delegated one member to address the City Assembly during the debate on the final version.



Participation as a Core Principle and Ongoing Process

The core principle of participation was based on four rationales: it is the Municipality's duty to involve those most affected; participative methods can improve the quality of policymaking; access to deliberative spaces holds intrinsic value; and inclusion affirms homeless people's equal membership in society. An anonymous survey of the Council indicated high satisfaction with the process. Written feedback included: “I could share my opinion and voice my complaints” and “Our shared problems fostered unity, and we listened to each other.”

Participation continues throughout implementation. For instance, a reform of municipal cash transfers for people experiencing homelessness involved both a survey of recipients and dedicated participatory forums. While the strategy defines priorities over ten years, funding decisions are made annually through the municipal budget.

Inspiration note

From Temporary Shelter to Preventive Housing

The Municipality of Budapest has a legal duty to provide temporary accommodation for homeless individuals and has traditionally been active in delivering such. However, these efforts have largely focused on symptomatic treatment—providing services to those already homeless—while neglecting measures to prevent homelessness or ensure affordable housing.

This oversight contributed to persistently high levels of chronic homelessness. The Budapest Municipality set out to design a new ten-year homelessness strategy with the goal of shifting the paradigm. By placing housing at the core of its approach and amplifying the voices of homeless citizens, the strategy aims to prioritise prevention and long-term solutions over token measures.

A Bold Stand in a Challenging Political Climate

Homeless services and policies face a fundamental limitation: they attempt to address homelessness, a consequence of systemic wealth and income inequalities, without tackling these root causes. Another key barrier to effective policy lies in the societal perception of "the homeless" as a separate group, seen as incapable or undeserving of housing like other citizens.

Hungarian national government policies have increasingly emphasised the criminalisation of homelessness, focusing on punitive measures rather than social supports for the most vulnerable. State-sponsored media incites intolerance toward homeless people. Within this difficult political climate, Budapest has emerged as a municipality taking a radically different approach to its national administration, thus showing that regions, cities and localities can display agency in creating inclusive local policies.



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An important message to all countries and municipalities: it is essential to involve individuals with lived experience of homelessness in the development of public policy. Their insights not only contribute to more informed and effective decision-making in the fight against homelessness, but also demonstrate that people who have experienced homelessness possess valuable resources. When given the opportunity to participate actively in shaping solutions, they can not only improve their own situations but also contribute to sustainable outcomes for all those at risk of becoming homeless.

