

THE LIFE AND CHALLENGES of the Hungarian community in the Slovak Republic



The life and challenges
of the Hungarian community
in the Slovak Republic





Europe's strength lies in its diversity. Each human being and each nation adds something to the wonderful human achievement we call European culture.

The European Union guarantees the peaceful coexistence of different people and nations, but despite the best intentions, there are still unresolved issues.

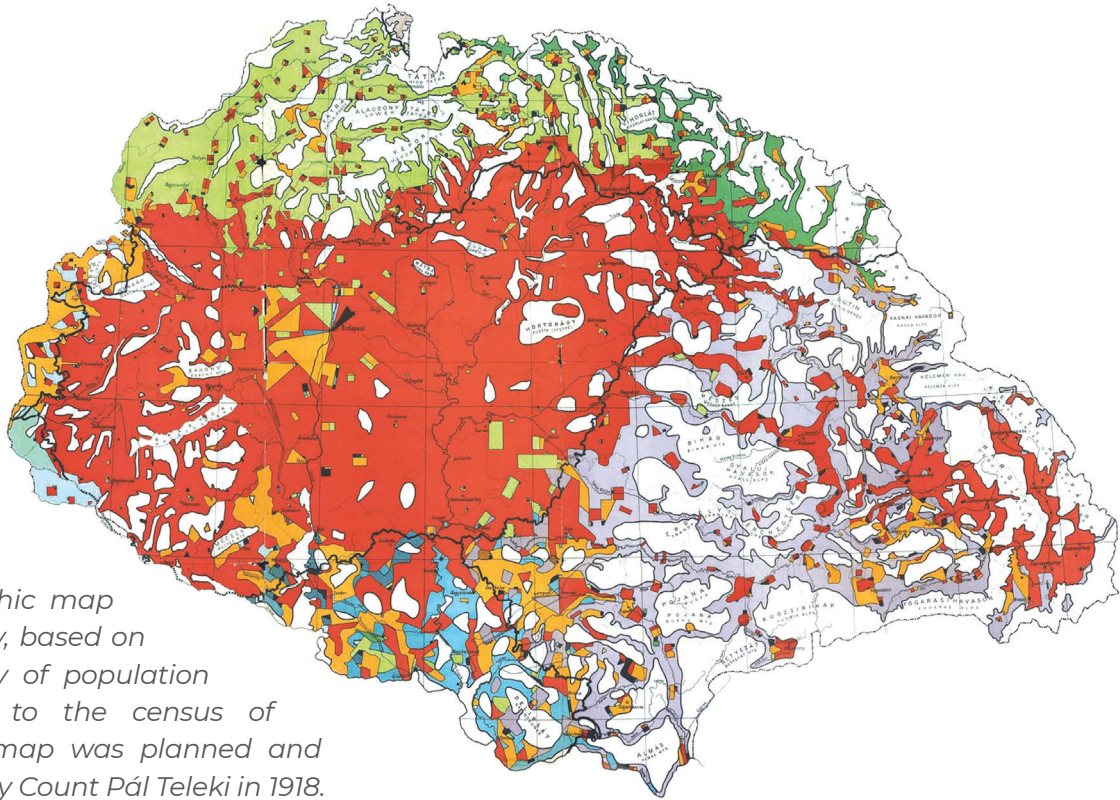
Like the issues of Hungarians in Slovakia

Many Hungarians have their homeland in today's Slovakia

The peace treaties that ended the horrors of the First World War did not allow self-determination to all nations, or more precisely, not as they should have.

In the nation states, created from the Kingdom of Hungary, 3,425,000 Hungarians found themselves separated from their motherland.

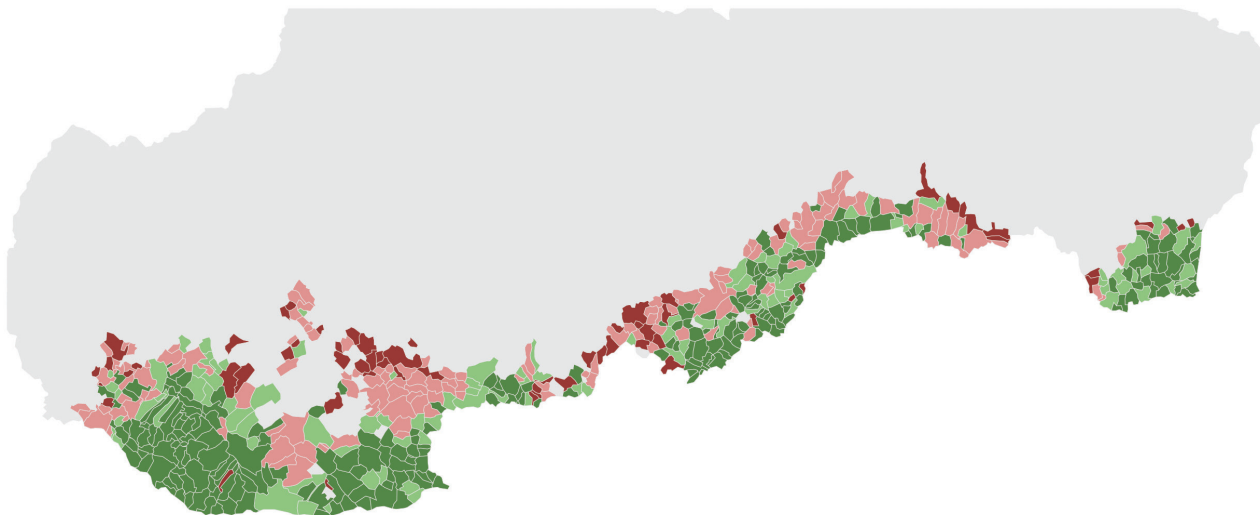




Ethnographic map of Hungary, based on the density of population according to the census of 1910. The map was planned and executed by Count Pál Teleki in 1918.

The share of the Hungarian population in the municipalities of Slovakia

Portion of Hungarians ● 5-15% ● 15-50% ● 50-67% ● above 67%



After the First World War Czechoslovakia became the new home of around 800,000 Hungarians, formerly living in Hungary, without ever having left their homeland. The decision was made without taking into account the right to self-determination; no referendum was held in Czechoslovakia.

These decisions led to the fact that just two decades later, Europe was once again engulfed in the flames of hatred. The agreements that ended the horrors of the Second World War divided the continent. The issues of national communities were not settled satisfactorily. Yet again!



The „small Berlin” of the Hungarians

After the Trianon Treaty many Hungarian communities lost their connections with their neighbours. The most iconic example of this is the history of two small hungarian villages, Nagyszelmenc and Kiszszelmenc. These two small settlements had always been interconnected during their 1000 years old history, they were practically the same village, until 1946.

After the I. World War, Szelmenc, in whole, became part of the newly formed

Czechoslovakia in 1920. The Vienna accord of 1938 granted back some of Hungary's lost territories, Szelmenc and the lower Carpathians included. In 1945, the Soviet Red Army occupied the area and tried to push its border as far west as possible. Unfortunately, for the families of Szelmenc, Stalin made that border through the middle of main street.

Over the course of a single night, a 20-foot high wood plank, a little Berlin Wall was built to prevent people, families, relatives, friends and lovers from seeing each other. Yelling across to their families was a criminal offense.

The issue was more or less solved only in 2005, when a border crossing was built between the two villages with the help of the European Union and the American Congress.



“I could never bury my family members”

The border not only divided buildings and streets, it also separated people. Many of the people, who were on the wrong side, were not allowed to reunite with their families that day, and the only means of communication was yelling across the border.

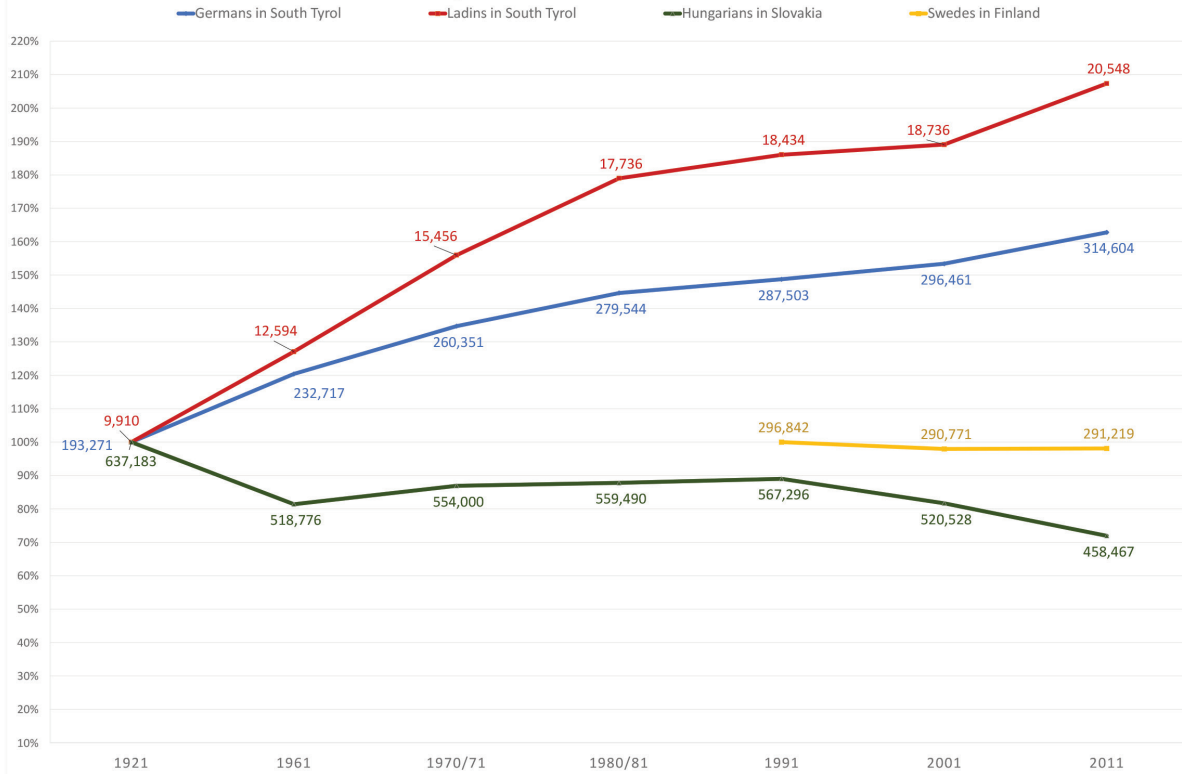
For example, a resident from Szelmenc, Stefan Ignac's grandmother and mother lived and died on the (Czech)Slovak side. Since Stefan lived on the Ukrainian (former Soviet) side, he missed their funerals. He couldn't even bring flowers to their graves.

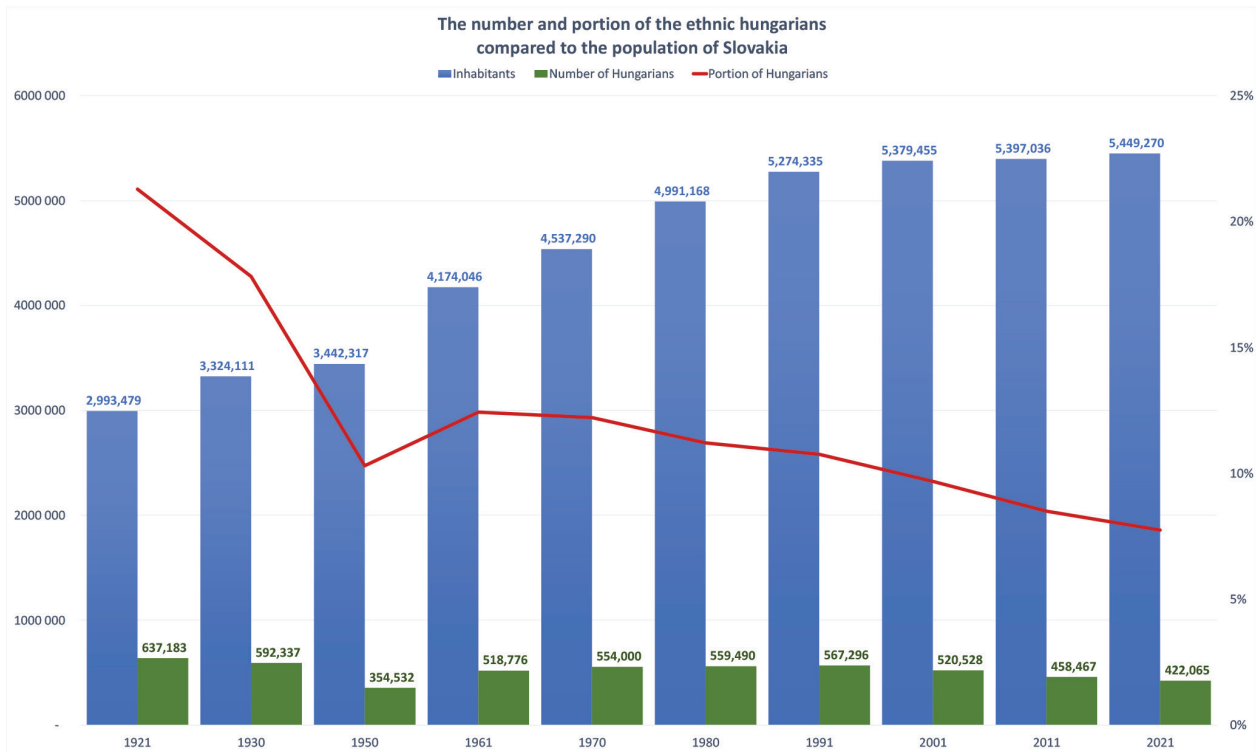
Who are we?

Legally and in terms of their citizenship, the Hungarians living in Slovakia are connected to the country, but due to their language, their nationality, their cultural heritage and their family ties, they are also closely connected to Hungary.

According to the 2021 census, 456,000 Hungarians live in Slovakia, typically in the southern parts of the country, from the capital Bratislava to the eastern capital of Slovakia, Košice.

The development of the minority communities (Change in number of identified members) compared to the first available census





Famous Hungarians born and/or raised in (Czecho)Slovakia



Vámbéry Ármin

Hungarian Turkologist, orientalist and traveller



László Kubala

One of the best football players in history, a hero of FC Barcelona



Sándor Márai

Writer, poet



Count János Esterházy

Ethnic Hungarian politician in interwar Czechoslovakia, the martyr of Hungarians in Slovakia,



Alexandra Borbély

Theatre and film actress, best European actress of 2017

The main issues

According to the 2021 census, 456,000 citizens of Hungarian nationality live in Slovakia. In 1921, at the time of the first census after the First World War, this number almost reached 640 thousand.

To understand the essence of the problem, we have to ask the question, why did their number decrease so much?

In the years that have passed since then, the Hungarians living in Czechoslovakia and then in Slovakia had to face many problems. There was a time when their schools were closed, their children could not learn

Hungarian language at school, the Czechoslovak state deprived them of their citizenship and property. The lands confiscated from Hungarian farmers went to Czech and Slovak people who came and then settled from other parts of the country.

All these punishments were set on the Hungarian people collectively, purely on the basis of their ancestry!

In fact, 75 years ago, many of them were banished from their homeland because of their origin. The Hungarians were forcibly taken from their homeland to the Czech Republic, to replace the German citizens who were expelled from there. 42,000 Hungarians, including 6,000 children under the age of 6, were loaded into train wagons, just after the horrors of the Holocaust.

Some form of these punishments still lives on!

Ethnic discrimination is still alive in Slovakia! The Beneš Decrees, which are solely based on ethnic discriminations, are part of both the Czech and Slovak legal order, even after these countries were admitted into the EU in 2004. The practice is currently being pursued amid the disinterest of the European Union.

After the fall of communist Czechoslovakia and the Velvet Revolution, the situation in the newly formed Slovak Republic did not improve much either. The emerging Slovak nation state tried to integrate and assimilate the Hungarian community, sometimes with harsher and sometimes with more subtle means.

The schools of the Hungarian community were threatened with closure, the Hungarians were punished for using their native language, but they managed to preserve.

After Slovakia's accession to the European Union, in which Hungarian politicians from Slovakia played a decisive role, most of the problems disappeared or became redundant.

But NOT all of them!

Burning questions of Hungarian minority rights!

- collective guilt as subject of Slovak national law
- use of their native language
- comprehensive law regarding minorities
- assimilation, loss of culture
- disproportionate distribution of economic, cultural and educational subsidies
- discriminatory administrative division of Slovakia

Although, the existence of Hungarians in Slovakia is not in danger, their slow



decline, the erosion of their unique culture, and the disappearance of their mother tongue continue to threaten this community of half a million.

One example:

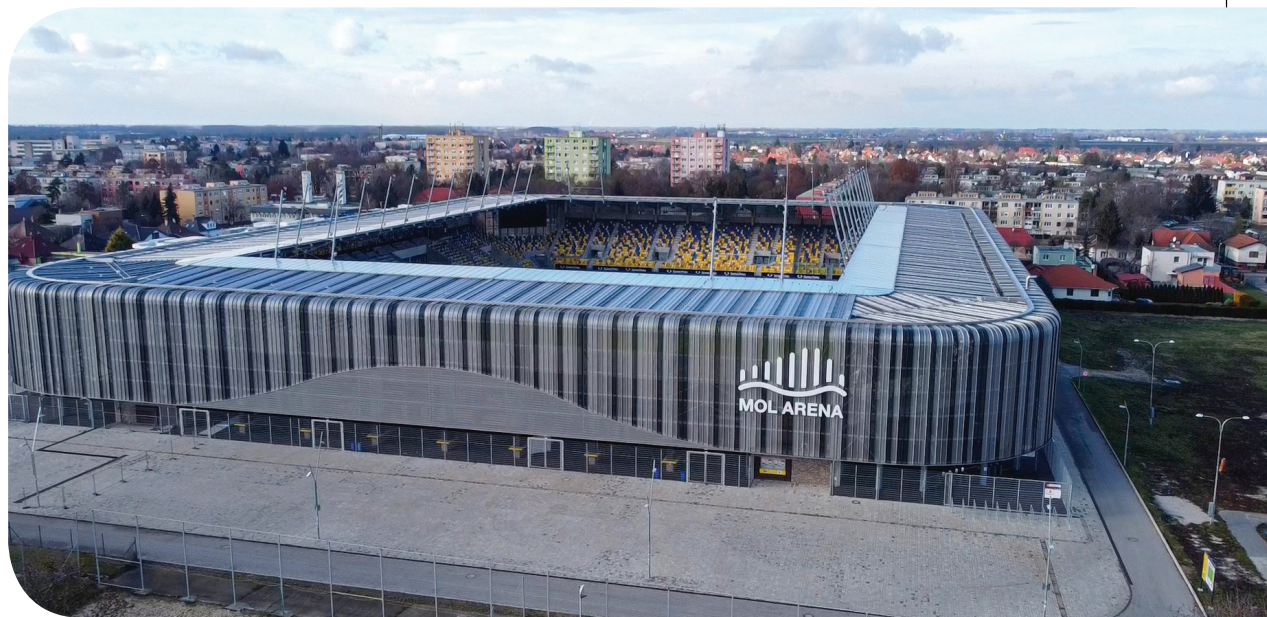
In 2009 the language law regulating the use of the Slovak language was amended in a way, that the use of the mother tongue of Hungarians was restricted in many aspects of day-to-day life. For example, there was a penalty for publishing an ad for Hungarian nationals in newspapers only in Hungarian.

Michael Gahler, then Vice-President of the Committee on Foreign Affairs said about this issue:

“Slovakia violates the EU’s commonly accepted and respected norms and ignores the relevant recommendations of the Council of Europe, which were made in order to expand the use of minority languages.”

This issue was solved eventually, but in recent decades, Hungarians in Slovakia have had to face many similar direct and indirect restrictions.





Closing words

We believe that Europe's strength lies in its diversity! We believe that each minority contributes to the unique, unrepeatable, yet wonderfully diverse face of Europe.

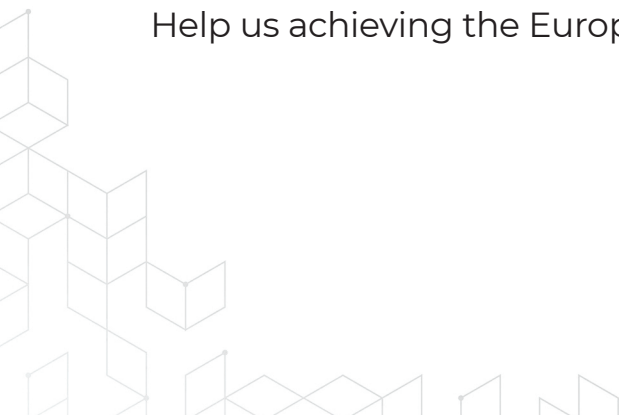
For this very reason, we believe that all minorities, whether they are linguistic, national, cultural, religious, or any other, deserve support and protection.



With the disappearance of a minority or community, something also disappears from Europe. Something that can never return. With the disappearance of a minority, Europe also becomes poorer. In a challenging world, we need a strong, united, but diverse Europe!

The Hungarians living in Slovakia also need such a Europe!

Help us achieving the Europe of our dreams!



Notes

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....



**The life and challenges
of the Hungarian community in the Slovak Republic**

Published by Pro Civis Civil Society Organization, Vám tér 1, 930 40
Csallóközcsütörtök, statistical number 37846671

Place and year of publication: Csallóközcsütörtök, 2022

Funded by: