A QUIET LETTER ABOUT THE NUMBERS WE ALL PAY

The World Upside Down

Hungary · 2026

Dear stranger,

1. The price of a person

Hungary reports an average cost per day of detention, but in euro. This letter keeps every Hungarian figure in forint and does not convert, so it takes the state's prison bill in forint from the European classification of government spending and divides it by the days served that the Council of Europe publishes from the prison administration's own return.

One day in a Hungarian prison costs 29,697 Ft.

One day in a primary school costs 3,754 Ft.

The difference is 7.9 times.

That is the whole comparison.

Sources:

- Eurostat, 2024: general government expenditure on prisons (COFOG function GF0304), HUF 203,762 million for Hungary (gov_10a_exp, sector S13, national currency). Government expenditure by function includes the pay of the staff who run the prisons.
- https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov_10a_exp/default/table?lang=en
- Council of Europe, SPACE I 2025, 2024 data: Table 33, Hungary row — column 31A reports 6,861,278 days spent in penal institutions in 2024, column 33A an average of €52.40 a day. That euro figure is not used: the letter keeps every amount in forint and does not convert. The same row reports a total prison-administration budget of €553,852,405.00 (column 33G).
- https://wp.unil.ch/space/files/2026/06/260626_rapport-space-i-2025.pdf
- Eurostat, 2023: HUF 1,370,127.7 of public expenditure per primary-school pupil (educ_uoe_fine09, ISCED 1, national currency, full-time equivalent). The series ends in 2023 and carries no 2024 observation for Hungary.
- https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/educ_uoe_fine09/default/table?lang=en
- Calculation: 203762000000 / 6861278 = 29,697.38; 1370127.7 / 365 = 3,753.77; 29697.38 / 3753.77 = 7.91, shown as 7.9.

2. The price of a job

A lawyer earns 51,466 Ft a day.

An accountant earns 41,854 Ft a day.

A teacher earns 40,523 Ft a day.

A cleaner earns 16,702 Ft a day.

All four are gross, before tax.

All four come from one table. The Central Statistical Office publishes the average gross monthly earnings of full-time employees by occupation at four-digit code level. The lawyer is the group of lawyers and legal advisers. The accountant is the group of auditors, accountants and accounting experts. The teacher is the group of secondary-school teachers. The cleaner is the group of institutional cleaners and helpers. Each monthly figure is multiplied by twelve and divided by two hundred and sixty working days.

The range itself is the story.

Sources:

- Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 2026: STADAT table 20.1.1.52, "Full-time employees average gross earnings by occupation [HUF/person/month]", last updated 13 March 2026, 2025 column: 2611 lawyer, legal adviser HUF 1,115,095; 2513 auditor, accountant HUF 906,836; 2421 secondary education teacher HUF 877,998; 9112 cleaner and helper in institutions HUF 361,884.
- https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/mun/en/mun0208.html
- Calculation: 1115095 * 12 / 260 = 51,465.92; 906836 * 12 / 260 = 41,853.97; 877998 * 12 / 260 = 40,522.98; 361884 * 12 / 260 = 16,702.34.

3. The loop

The government takes in 37,447,425,000,000 Ft.

The government spends 41,592,419,000,000 Ft.

The difference is 4,144,994,000,000 Ft.

This time the difference is a deficit. The state spent more than it took in.

The loop is not broken. It is simply pointed somewhere.

Sources:

- Eurostat, 2025: general government (S13) total revenue HUF 37,447,425 million and total expenditure HUF 41,592,419 million (gov_10a_main, national currency). Central government, local government and social-security funds together. Dataset updated 2026-10-21; no provisional status flag on the 2025 observations.
- https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov_10a_main/default/table?lang=en
- Eurostat, 2025: net borrowing of HUF 4,144,994 million, 4.7% of GDP (gov_10a_main, B9); general government gross debt 74.4% of GDP (gov_10dd_edpt1, sector S13, Maastricht definition).
- https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov_10dd_edpt1/default/table?lang=en
- Calculation: 41,592,419 ? 37,447,425 = 4,144,994 million forint.

4. Where the loop points

The single largest item is old-age pensions: 5,607,870,000,000 Ft.

A lot of money goes to catching people after they fall.

Much less goes to making sure they do not fall in the first place.

This is not a conspiracy. It is a habit.

Sources:

- Eurostat, 2024: COFOG function GF1002 (old age), general government, HUF 5,607,870 million — 14.6% of total expenditure and the largest single sub-function. The whole social-protection function (GF10) is HUF 9,986,601 million, 26.0% of the total. For comparison: health (GF07) HUF 3,844,820 million, education (GF09) HUF 4,009,774 million, hospital services (GF0703) HUF 1,842,896 million, transport (GF0405) HUF 3,076,202 million, pre-primary and primary education (GF0901) HUF 905,775 million, defence (GF02) HUF 1,617,807 million, police services (GF0301) HUF 846,053 million, prisons (GF0304) HUF 203,762 million, 0.5% of the total. Total expenditure across all COFOG functions is HUF 38,398,092 million.
- https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov_10a_exp/default/table?lang=en

5. Five lines worth naming

Pre-primary and primary education: about 2,481,575,342 Ft per day (905,775,000,000 Ft per year).

Transport: about 8,427,950,685 Ft per day (3,076,202,000,000 Ft per year).

Hospital services: about 5,049,030,137 Ft per day (1,842,896,000,000 Ft per year).

Defence: about 4,432,347,945 Ft per day (1,617,807,000,000 Ft per year).

Police services: about 2,317,953,425 Ft per day (846,053,000,000 Ft per year).

Some are large. Some are small. Each of them is a decision, written down.

Sources:

- Eurostat, 2024: COFOG function GF0901 (pre-primary and primary education), HUF 905,775 million.
- https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov_10a_exp/default/table?lang=en
- Eurostat, 2024: COFOG function GF0405 (transport), HUF 3,076,202 million.
- https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov_10a_exp/default/table?lang=en
- Eurostat, 2024: COFOG function GF0703 (hospital services), HUF 1,842,896 million.
- https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov_10a_exp/default/table?lang=en
- Eurostat, 2024: COFOG function GF02 (defence), HUF 1,617,807 million.
- https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov_10a_exp/default/table?lang=en
- Eurostat, 2024: COFOG function GF0301 (police services), HUF 846,053 million.
- https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov_10a_exp/default/table?lang=en
- Daily figures divide each annual amount by 365.

6. The habit

We are all part of this habit.

We pay taxes. We vote. We work. We accept the numbers.

Not because we consciously chose them, but because we were born into them.

No one ever showed us the whole picture at once. This letter is that picture.

7. The other number

One cent per day. That is 1,330 Ft (€3.65 at the European Central Bank reference rate of 364.40 forint per euro on 3 November 2026) per person per year.

The idea is simple: instead of paying 29,697 Ft every day for the end of someone's story, what happens if many people each give one cent a day for the beginning of the story?

You give one cent every day. Over a full year that is 1,330 Ft (€3.65 at the European Central Bank reference rate of 364.40 forint per euro on 3 November 2026).

No promises. No guarantees. No returns.

Just a place, a question, a group of people, a very small amount of money, and the freedom to stop at any time.

Sources:

- Calculation: one cent per day, multiplied by the days in a year, is EUR 3.65; at the European Central Bank reference rate of 364.40 forint per euro on 3 November 2026 that is 1,330.06 forint, shown as 1,330.
- Eurostat, 2024: the HUF 203,762 million general-government prisons total and the 6,861,278 days quoted in chapter 1, which give the daily prison cost named here.
- https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov_10a_exp/default/table?lang=en
- https://wp.unil.ch/space/files/2026/06/260626_rapport-space-i-2025.pdf
- European Central Bank, 2026: euro reference rates for 3 November 2026.
- https://www.ecb.europa.eu/stats/policy_and_exchange_rates/euro_reference_exchange_rates/html/index.en.html

8. What this letter is not

It is not a business plan. It is not a political programme. It is not a religion. It is not a solution.

It is a mirror.

9. What you can do

Nothing. Or something. That is the whole choice.

You can look at the public numbers. You can join the experiment and give one cent a day, 1,330 Ft (€3.65 at the European Central Bank reference rate of 364.40 forint per euro on 3 November 2026) a year. Or you can close this letter and forget it.

No one is obliged. That is the point.

10. The world upside down

It costs more to keep someone in a cell than to teach a child.

It costs more to treat people after they fall than to prevent the fall.

It costs more to argue than to listen.

It costs more to count the money than to spend it well.

This letter does not turn the world the right way up. It only shows you that it is currently upside down.

11. One last number

One cent. Per day. Per person. 1,330 Ft (€3.65 at the European Central Bank reference rate of 364.40 forint per euro on 3 November 2026) per year.

That is all that is asked. Not because it is enough, but because it is honest, and because it is completely yours to choose.

Sources:

- Calculation: one cent per day, multiplied by the days in a year, is EUR 3.65; at the European Central Bank reference rate of 364.40 forint per euro on 3 November 2026 that is 1,330.06 forint, shown as 1,330.

12. The layer underneath

The differences are psychotic. Extreme is not too strong a word.

One day in a Hungarian prison costs almost eight days in a Hungarian classroom. A lawyer's day is worth about three times a cleaner's, and a teacher's day is worth about four fifths of a lawyer's. These are not small gaps. They are public, they are measured, and they were chosen.

Money is not the problem. The money exists. The state takes in more than thirty-seven trillion forint a year and spends more than forty-one; its debt is about three quarters of everything the country produces. The loop turns. The problem is where the money goes.

The price is not the problem either. The price of a prisoner, a teacher, a child or a cleaner is not a natural law. These prices were decided. They can be decided differently.

What lies underneath is consent, choices, expectations, input.

We consent to these numbers, not because we voted for them, but because we never refused them. We make choices, or we let others make them for us. We carry expectations about what work is worth, who deserves what, what a child needs, and what a prisoner costs. And we either give input into the system, or we stay silent.

The numbers are not the problem. Our consent is the material. Our choices are the shape. Our expectations are the weight. Our input is the only thing that can change it.

With quiet hope, A stranger