

## Annex B

### HUNGARY

I arrived in Budapest from Estonia at 17.30, only to find that my suitcase had failed to make the transfer to my connecting flight in Prague. It was eventually delivered to my hotel room at 0600 the following day.

My hotel was conveniently located. It was a brisk 30 minutes walk to the centre of town or a leisurely stroll of about 45 minutes. Throughout the week the weather remained particularly pleasant with clear blue skies and day temperatures up to 26 degrees.

Unlike Estonia, where I arrived on the Sunday afternoon, in Budapest I had the weekend to explore the city and to orientate myself with the public transport system. On the Saturday morning I set off walking towards the city centre.

#### Museum and Gardens

As I neared the centre the height of the buildings steadily grew and the history was evident. Like many other European cities, the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had clearly seen a massive programme of outstanding construction and building.



The National Opera House, with its lavish gold leaf, Italian marble and wooden carvings was particularly impressive. Wide streets with tall buildings and large trees provided shade from the sun. Cafés and restaurants were everywhere, enabling the visitor to pause and reflect upon what life might have been like back late in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**National Opera House**

Having walked for about 4 miles I recognised that within the time available, there was simply too much to see on foot. I therefore decided to take one of the many 2 hour tourists open-deck bus rides. This was a good decision. With my headset on I was provided with a brief history lesson of Hungary through the ages with all

the main points of interest being pointed out along the way. This enabled me to plan the rest of the week and my continuing efforts to see more.



Within the heart of city the tourist and business areas are being tastefully renovated and developed. That said, many examples from the fighting during the 56 uprising can still be seen.

**Before and after**

Similarly, there are numerous areas of severe deprivation both within the city and its suburbs. Living accommodation in some of these areas is extremely poor. Many roads need resurfacing and graffiti, although appearing to be somewhat old, is a severe blight on the majority of walls within easy reach of its associated 'artists'. The level of investment needed to bring about continuing improvements is enormous, as is the time required to implement it.



Further a-field, new buildings such as the National Concert Hall were to my mind wonderful examples of modern architecture and technical expertise, it being one of the finest acoustic environments in Europe. Sadly I was unable to purchase any tickets for special showing of Tosca that week.

**National Concert Hall**

Hungary's population is about 10 million people. Having spoken to many during my stay, including those within the public and private sectors, it is again evident that over the last 15 years the gap between the rich and the poor has grown significantly. Many elderly have found the transition particularly difficult. Similarly, rural areas have struggled and in an effort to seek work large numbers of people have migrated to Budapest and other urban areas. Average salaries are about £300 - £400 a month. Most people live from month to month and hand to mouth with no capacity for saving. I was struck by the number of people who were begging and sleeping rough on the streets of the capital.

It was described to me how, at the time of Hungary's new found freedom, numerous people thought that they could make their fortunes. Unfortunately, whilst willing to take the risks and run with their respective entrepreneurial visions, many lacked the business skills and understanding to implement their plans. Large numbers lost everything and have subsequently struggled simply to survive. Such impacts upon people's lives have remained, resulting in a real fear of repeating such experiences and losses.

As with most former Soviet dominated regimes, in the immediate aftermath of 1991 a number of dishonest people profited by the positions that they held at the time. Some people suggested to me that corruption is still an issue and that they simply lack confidence in the government and those in opposition. Even if corruption is not as deep as some suggest, the perception remains. Individuals suggested that in the short term, elections are a waste of time.



**Hungary's Parliament Buildings**

Of note, the week after my visit a Government tape was leaked recording a statement by the Prime Minister admitting that his Socialist party had lied before the last election, that in the last 4 years the government had achieved little and that the economy had only survived because of the general flow of money. This disclosure caused the worst demonstrations and violent protest for two decades with demands for the Prime Minister's resignation. Importantly however,

the fact that such a tape was made public is a positive sign of change. Similarly, the demonstrations were a clear indication that the people will not tolerate the abuse of power. As a consequence, despite all these difficulties and other pains in the country's transition, I believe things will continue to improve.

The younger people I spoke to have high expectations and are striving to take advantage of new opportunities. With the highest public deficit in the EU, many are awaiting the investment of future EU funding and are keen to ensure that this money is used wisely and effectively.

Moving on to Hungary's attempts to deal with youth crime, I again sensed a real drive to implement change, this momentum being limited only by the current level of available funding and resources and the willingness of Ministers to take the necessary perceived risks associated with such change. Certainly a range of new legislation is being drafted for implementation over the next 3-4 years.

Being hosted by Hungary's Probation service, on the first day of my visit I was invited to join a pan European EQUAL funded project with partners from the UK, France, Germany, Poland, Austria and the Netherlands. The morning was given over to reaffirming the need for change and by each country's representatives outlining the work of the respective organisations.

Dr Ruzsonyi outlined some of the issues associated with Hungary's prison system. The country has 33 conventional prisons, 12 establishments that provide various forms of industry outcomes and skills training (LTDs) and 6 institutions. The overall capacity is for 11,348 people. Unfortunately there are 16,000 prisoners in the system, including those on remand, representing a massive problem of overcrowding. On average there are 4,000 people on remand at any one time. Dr Ruzsonyi went on to describe how three new prisons are to be built based upon the Pedagogical concept of the European prison system.



#### **Budapest's Remand Prison**

In the afternoon we visited two of Budapest's prisons. The first establishment did not immediately appear like a prison. It consisted of three tall tower blocks with administrative buildings at a lower level. The only clue to a secure environment was a small wire entanglement on top of the surrounding low wall. Although some sentenced prisoners were held there, the majority were apparently

on remand. From the cell windows high up in the towers prisoners had an extensive view over the surrounding urban area. Some were even seen communicating by hand signals to relatives and friends on the outside. Remand prisoners are only entitled to one visit each month so the possibility of this alternative communication was clearly welcomed by prisoners and their families. Interestingly, sentenced prisoners were allowed two visits each month. I was unable to ascertain why this was so.

The exercise area was on the top of the building. For so many prisoners, it appeared to be a relatively small space enclosed by an open mesh steel wall and overhead roof. One can only imagine what it might be like in the middle of winter with a cold east wind blowing. During our visit no prisoners were observed taking exercise. Although we were briefed on the various activities that prisoners can undertake (education and other skills training), despite being overcrowded, none of this was apparent and we saw few prisoners during our visit. Those we did see were involved in cleaning duties or similar administrative work. Noticeably, the prison appeared to lack any sense of life and 'sole'.

Re-offending rates are as much as 80%. A number of new draft laws on sentencing are currently being proposed. All apparently emphasise a move away from punitive systems with a focus towards rehabilitation and improved opportunities for education, skills and employment. There is also to be a particular focus on juveniles with efforts to ensure that whenever possible these young people are kept out of the criminal justice system through alternative intervention and diversionary schemes. I was particularly encouraged to hear this as much of what was being promoted we had previously delivered at C-FAR through our Life Change programme. All is to be welcomed and applauded; implementation is urgently needed.

Many of Hungary's prisoners are from a Roma / Gypsy background, particularly the younger age group. We were told that the average time on remand is 18 months, although for some it could be as long as 3 years. This apparently stems from the backlog of investigations and the workload of prosecutors, police and probation staffs. During our visit we could see that overcrowding is a real problem with up to four prisoners having to occupy a cell designed for a maximum of two.

From here we visited another prison designed to hold in the order of 1000 medium risk offenders. It was very old. Although its physical infrastructure was much worse and actually extremely poor, it reminded me of Dartmoor prison and many other local city establishments in UK. We were given a slide presentation explaining the history of the prison and how it works.

The majority of the prison can only be described as very tired and in need of massive investment. One wing we entered was actually quite dark and rose high up to a glass roof where plants could be seen growing in various hanging containers and baskets. The cells were overcrowded and depressing. The atmosphere was certainly not conducive to positive change and rehabilitation. Of note, another wing had recently been refurbished and was bright and airy. Unfortunately, this was not being used for prisoner accommodation. Rather it is utilised as a transit change over facility each Monday when prisoners were brought in from other prisons before moving to alternative establishments. This was part of Hungary's equivalent to the UK's 'churn' and continuing movement of prisoners around the country.

The following day I was taken to see an institution for girls and young women aged 14 – 19 years. The property is 120 years old. It has clearly seen some basic maintenance and painting at various times; however, much of the structure is in its original state. Although capable of taking up to 78 girls, it currently held 40. Most of the girls are serving sentences, others are on remand. Remand can last for two years. Sentences vary, but largely because of the extended periods of remand, average between 12 – 18 months. Up to eight places are being used to provide a form of aftercare. Three of the girls have young children less than 3 years of age. Five such centres or institutions exist in Hungary, 2 for girls and 3 for boys.

The routines for both sentenced and remand inmates are the same with efforts made to provide for the personal needs of each person. During the first two months the staff endeavour to establish background information on each girl, including family circumstances. Assuming there is family support, girls are initially allowed to visit their homes once a month. After that, providing rules are not abused, weekly and weekend visits are then allowed.

The living accommodation is generally warm and homely with shared bedrooms and communal living areas. The majority of the day is given over to structured academic, general education, cultural and exercise programmes. Activities are undertaken in groups of 6 – 8 girls with two educationalists / social workers working with each group. In some cases efforts are made to provide opportunities for basic vocational training; however, this is very limited.

On average 80% of the girls are from Roma / Gypsy backgrounds. Having experienced various levels of abuse and failure, many apparently tend to demonstrate somewhat challenging behaviour and have a range of special needs. One Psychologist undertakes brief weekly visits and intervention. A doctor visits three times a week and trained medical nurses are present. Although no HIV cases currently exist, a number of girls do suffer from Hepatitis B & C.

It was explained to me that during the soviet era society was more focussed upon 'social and community groups' and their requirements. Since the change of regimes such support has diminished. As a consequence many such groups, particularly those in rural areas, have struggled to survive. Without education and essential skills, employment has become particularly difficult for these Roma girls and owing to the loss of jobs and inability to cope, suicide rates have increased. Alternatively, many have moved into prostitution.

Undoubtedly staff members in the institute work very hard to introduce the girls to a happier style of life and are committed to providing a caring and loving environment. Sadly, on leaving the institution, there are no formal arrangements for the girls' futures, particularly the provision of accommodation and employment. Some efforts are made to find foster homes; however, the reality is

that most are compelled to return to the streets and the world that they previously knew. The lack of hope and cycle of depravation, abuse and child prostitution often continues.

On the morning of the following day I was invited to meet with Probation staff at the Probation Day Centre. The centre provides a focal point where offenders in the community are required to report and where they can be given additional information and support in seeking employment. It is also from here that sentences for community work are supervised. My hosts were two young women, one working with adult offenders, the other with juveniles and young adults. The former had a case load of 270 offenders and the latter 73. Both admitted that they had insufficient time to undertake the type of work and support that they would normally wish. Simply meeting with each person once a month was difficult. Notwithstanding, both they and other staff showed a strong belief in alternatives to prison and desire to help offenders into work. Some small group programmes are delivered and there is an increasing interest in the concept of Restorative Justice and working with NGOs and Third Sector organisations. I will return to this later in the report.

In the afternoon I joined another member of the Probation staff as he undertook a home visit to the family of a 15 year old boy accused of assault and sexual harassment of a woman whilst she was apparently under the influence of alcohol. The home of the young man was situated in the back streets of a very deprived area of Budapest. Once again the family was from a Roma / Gypsy background. The mother, the young man and his elder sister were standing at the entrance to their home, their front door stepping directly onto the pavement of the street. Having introduced ourselves we were invited into a pace of about 5 sq m. This area doubled up as the kitchen, dining area and living space. Behind a curtain in the corner near the front door there was toilet and shower room. On the other side was a small single bedroom with a curtained hanging space for clothes. In the other corner near the front door was a tight spiral staircase that led to another bedroom on the floor above. Although very basic the home was clean and tidy. It was clear that the mother took pride in her small home and her family. Her husband had that day started a new job working in a kitchen of a café. This was apparently the first job that he had secured for some time and his wife was clearly pleased. We were invited to sit at a small table about a metre square and offered a coffee and cigarette. We accepted the coffee but declined the cigarettes.

My Probation host had the task of preparing a pre- sentence report. Importantly, his report was to be submitted to the Prosecutor along with a separate report provided by the Police. It would then be left to the Prosecutor to decide if the young man was to be processed through the court system, whether an alternative form of intervention was more appropriate, or indeed whether there should be any further action at all.

Without going into the specific detail of the case, after an hour of questions and discussion with the young man and his mother, my Probation host came to the conclusion that no further action should be taken. Having had all the circumstances explained to me afterwards, including the Police report and description of the events that allegedly unfolded, I agreed with my host. This was to my mind a case of poor initial investigation and a failure to take into account all the circumstances that arose. An incident that should have been dealt with by a warning was causing a considerable amount of additional work and wasted time before it would be closed. My Probation officer described how he spent much of his time investigating such cases and that this was one of the reasons why cases took so long before coming to court or finally being dealt with.

On last day of my visit to Budapest I was privileged to meet with the Deputy Director of Hungary's Probation Service, other senior policy staff from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Employment and Labour, and individuals from various NGOs. All described how they are working diligently to promote work that will increasingly enable offenders to access education, vocational skills training and work. Listening to their briefings it was clear that Hungary is intent on promoting significant change within its criminal justice system (CJS). Importantly, there is a real drive to focus on juvenile offenders and to implement methods and systems that divert young people away from the CJS before they become criminalised. Numerous new policy documents and laws are being drafted or already piloted / implemented. The concept of partnerships between the Public and Third Sectors is very much seen as an essential part of the process, both in prisons and in the community. Policy makers are keen to learn from other countries and are already beginning to deploy individual models from the USA, Canada, Sweden, the Netherlands, and the UK. Mentoring of young people in Northern Ireland is a good example of this process. It was particularly encouraging to see how the Ministries of Internal Affairs and Employment and Labour were working so closely together. Increasingly the Ministry for Education is also taking a more effective role, both in the prisons and in the community.

Notwithstanding, the reality is that funding, resources and experience in delivery by front line staff is limited. All those I met recognised that the process will take time before new policies and systems are fully implemented and as effective as Hungary would wish. Hungary has already faced many challenges along the journey of change; the process will be long and difficult. Sadly the recent public upset in Hungary's political situation has not helped. That said, from my brief visit and the open and candid discussions that I have had with so many people, both in public office and the wider community, I am confident that within the country's criminal justice process change will continue to evolve.