# **Text  Description automatically generatedHuman Rights Workshop 2021**

Background

The Hungarian Human Rights Foundation (HHRF), in partnership with organizations in the Carpathian Basin, has decided to relaunch its Human Rights Workshop series to support the training of human rights activists.

HHRF is looking for enthusiastic individuals who are willing to contribute to the difficult but unique work that serves to protect the human rights of ethnic Hungarian minorities. We firmly believe that people who care deeply about the rights of Hungarian minorities and the protection of Hungarian cultural identity can spark real change.

Whether you are looking for a one-time project, weekly opportunities, an unpaid internship in any of our three locations, or can help out remotely: you are in the right place.

Each participant in the 2021 Human Rights Workshop will attend two of the following three sessions, based on their geographic location:

Session 1: Participants from the Carpathian Basin

Session 2: Participants from the U.S.

Session 3: Joint session for all participants

Who is HHRF?

Founded in 1976 in New York as the Committee for Human Rights in Rumania, the Hungarian Human Rights Foundation advocates for and monitors the human rightsof 2.5 million ethnic Hungarians who live as minorities in Croatia, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Slovakia and Ukraine, and who collectively comprise the largest national minority in Central Europe.

HHRF is a private, independent, not-for-profit which operates from its New York headquarters and maintains offices in Budapest and Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca). HHRF’s major activities are documenting and reporting on the human rights conditions of Hungarian minority communities; providing in-depth analyses for decision makers and expert testimony before the U.S. Congress and international forums; facilitating meetings for representatives of Hungarian minority communities in the U.S.; and implementing various youth-focused initiatives such as training in human rights advocacy, internship opportunities, and the “ReConnect” family of programs.

Why Focus on Hungarian Minorities?

By the terms of the Treaty of Trianon, adopted in 1920 following the First World War, the former Kingdom of Hungary lost 70 percent of its territory. As a result, one-third of the entire ethnic Hungarian population in the region now lived in the newly constituted neighboring countries. The treaty ensured the territorial integrity of the new states in return for guaranteeing the human rights of the ethnic Hungarians living within their borders.

Unfortunately, these guarantees were rarely honored. Over the course of the 20th century, ethnic minorities in these countries were subjected to discrimination and often brutal campaigns of forced assimilation. These campaigns included inciting anti-Hungarian hostilities; prohibiting the use of the Hungarian language; eliminating Hungarian-language educational, publishing and cultural institutions; forced population transfers; and the murder, imprisonment and exile of leading ethnic Hungarian dissidents.

In response, a handful of young Hungarian-Americans in New York formed what would become HHRF as a way to document these human rights violations and to encourage Western governments to lodge official protests on behalf of the Hungarian minorities, who had no way of presenting their plight at any international forum. From 1976 until 1989, HHRF was at the forefront of the West’s mounting concern about the persecution of ethnic minorities by communist regimes.

Are Minority Rights Still a Problem?

With the fall of communism in 1989, hopes were high that the Hungarian minorities’ unfavorable conditions could improve. However, ethnic Hungarians still faced a long struggle on several fronts to fully regain linguistic, educational, cultural, religious, and property rights so long denied to them.

In 2004, the enlargement of the European Union marked another turning point. To become a member of the EU, a country must meet the so-called “Copenhagen criteria” (defined at the 1993 meeting of the European Council in Copenhagen). These criteria include a stable democracy that respects human rights and the rule of law; a functioning market economy; and acceptance of the obligations of membership, including EU law. With the exception of Serbia and Ukraine, Hungary's neighboring countries are all members of the European Union; however, securing Hungarian minority rights is still a matter of debate.

The political developments of the past 30 years show progress in many legal and institutional areas affecting minorities. But much more needs to be done, as neither the international legal framework nor the institutions charged with implementation and compliance are fulfilling their mandate.

A recent hopeful development turned sour: the Minority Safepack Initiative (MSPI), a broad-based European citizens’ initiative, gathered over 1 million certified signatures and is currently before the EU. Its proposals include specifying and implementing minority rights at the European level, notably including the promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity was dismissed by the European Commission (EC arguing that the existing legal framework provides sufficient guarantees for minorities. As a result, it is probable that the European Parliament will litigate the issue at the European Court of Human Rights to force the EC to implement the MSPI recommendations.

The situation of Hungarian human rights remains unresolved; nationalist extremists in many countries are again targeting Hungarian minorities. Today, human rights violations can be more difficult to document, prove and prevent. The mission of HHRF remains ever so relevant.

Current Issues

A few examples of the challenges facing the Hungarian minority in neighboring countries:

1. The Hungarian minority in Ukraine, numbering 150,000, lives in the multi-ethnic region of Sub-Carpathia, near the Hungarian border. Ukraine is bound by international commitments to protect national minority rights, including native-language education at all levels – the key to preserving the community’s identity and its very future in the region. However, the recently passed education law severely undercuts native-language instruction.
2. Ukrainian officials and media publish hostile and accusatory statements that stigmatize the Hungarian minority and other ethnic groups, and embolden extremist Ukrainian nationalists, whose anti-Hungarian attacks – including acts of vandalism and a terrorist attack - have sharply increased in recent years.
3. On April 29, 2020 Romanian President Klaus Iohannis, in a broadly televised speech, incited hatred against the Hungarian minority, mocked their language and falsely accused them and their parliamentary representative party of secessionist attempts.
4. For three decades, officials at all levels of the Romanian government have delayed and denied the full return of buildings confiscated from religious minorities under communism, even defying European Court of Human Rights case decisions to do so. Unresolved is the lawful restitution of 2,140 properties from the four historically Hungarian denominations. Moreover, ethnic Hungarian civil servants who try to implement the lawful property restitutions have been prosecuted.
5. In 2020, the government Slovak Prime Minister Igor Matovič announced its plan to modify the law on dual citizenship. The modification would allow Slovak citizens living in other countries to assume the foreign country’s citizenship without losing their Slovak one. However, the law is not retroactive: consequently, ethnic Hungarians living in Slovakia who have dual Hungarian citizenship continue to face the loss of their Slovakian citizenship.

Human Rights Workshops: A 30-Year Track Record

In 1989, HHRF began to organize Human Rights Workshops to inspire and train a new generation of human rights advocates. While most workshop participants were of college age, they also included a number of veterans who added a wealth of personal experiences.

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| **Year** | **Location** | **Hosts, Organizers (in partnership with HHRF)** | **Notable Events** |
| 1989 | Wellsburg, WV | William Penn Association | Workshop coincided with Tiananmen Square events |
| 1990 | Catholic University of America (Washington, DC) | William Penn Association, HAHRC, MBK | Meetings with Congressional offices, White House Briefing, Hungarian Embassy, National Security Council |
| 1991 | Bannockburn, IL | HAHRC | Hungarian-American community of Chicago |
| 1992 | John Carroll University, Cleveland, OH | AHEA, HAC, MBK, Hungarian Scouts | Hungarian Americans representing * Republicans from Indiana
* Democrats from Ohio
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| 1994 | Hartford, CT | Hungarian Cultural Society of CT | Attended by Dr. Réka Szemerkényi (Ambassador of Hungary to the U.S., 2015-2017) |
| 1995 | Shepherdstown, WV | HAC | * Focus on collapse of Yugoslavia and effect on the Hungarians of Voivodina.
* Coincided with Presidential election campaign.
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| 1996 | Napa, CA | HAC |  |
| 1997 | Ypsilanti, MI | Eastern Michigan University (Krisztina Újvági) | * Special Guest: Tibetan human rights activist
* Closing discussion with Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur
 |
| 2000 | Washington, DC | HAC, American Hungarian Federation | Speakers from* Hungarian E-Lobby
* Ohio Northern University Law College American Hungarian Federation
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| 2005 | Budapest | HHRF | Two workshops in the spring for ethnic Hungarian youth from the Carpathian Basin with a focus on the Serbian province of Vojvodina (increased violence against children for speaking in Hungarian) |
| HHRF | Hungarian Human Rights Foundation |
| HAC | Hungarian American Coalition |
| HAHRC | Hungarian American Human Rights Council |
| MBK | Magyar Baráti Közösség (Hungarian Communion of Friends) (Itt-Ott) |
| AHEA | American Hungarian Educators Association |