



The **Hungarian Parliamentary Commissioner of Civil Rights**, Dr. Máté Szabó, decided to run a comprehensive project on issues relating to homelessness in 2008. The report of the project has been recently published, with the title “**Human Dignity Without Barriers**”¹. The aim of the project was to look at the problems homeless people face from a fundamental / human / civic rights point of view, and try to find solutions by gathering various stake holders (service providers, experts, local governments, civil servants and citizens, the police, etc).

As the official starting event of the project, the Ombudsman office organized an **exhibition** from the works of the homeless artists of “*We Exist*” Association in the Main Hall of the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Civil Rights².

They organised several **workshops** (“*Dialogue Instead of Barrier*”, „*Becoming homeless*”) with various actors ranging from social workers to representatives of the Ministry of Social Affairs, also exploring best practices from other EU Member States. The motto of the first conference was “**Let the first step be prevention**”, where participants agreed that the state should take more serious efforts in terms of prevention. This freedom – friendly resolution is more efficient and costs less money, than the treatment of the already existing homelessness. The ombudsman concluded that the state should speak up against stigmatization and prejudices, and instead of sanctions it should encourage co-operation – side by side with civil society – to help the most needy in Hungarian society.

In September, the Commissioner and the participants signed a document called **Social Charta**, which stated the most relevant problems and the solutions agreed on during the workshops. The **final conference**, “*Alternatives and solutions of homelessness*”, hosted *Johan Gortworst*, from the Federatie Opvang (Shelter Foundation) from the Netherlands, who held an excellent presentation about the Social Support Strategy project and the well-working examples of the Hague, Rotterdam and Amsterdam.

Finally, the **Commissioner issued reports** that have resulted from his legal, rights based investigations conducted in the framework of this project, around the following problems:

- benches with “barriers”
- attitude of the security guards/Budapest Public Transport Ltd.
- debt spiral
- procedures of court bailiffs
- accessibilty of ID/cards
- personal bankruptcy
- evictions

¹ The title was suggested by one of the first issued investigated by the Parliamentary Commissioner for civil Rights – barriers installed on public benches to make lying down impossible or highly uncomfortable.

² See also the 2009 spring issue of Homeless in Europe, FEANTSA’s Magazine, Homelessness and Arts: Creativity, empowerment and social change.

The full document can be downloaded in Hungarian (<http://www.obh.hu/allam/index.htm>).
An English summary will be made available soon.