

FETE MAGAZINE

STEPS FOR CATCHING UP

VOL. 4 | 2025/EN





6

CONVERGENCE 2.0

— Creating opportunities and values

KICK-OFF EVENT

“We believe that these settlements can be saved [...] proving that a disadvantaged community can achieve significant success,” said Miklós Vercs, Prime Minister Commissioner, at Nyírpilis at the opening event of the newest period of the programme launched to help the communities of the poorest villages in each age.

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10

EDUCATION

10

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Growing attention, shrinking distances

Hungary's first Community Learning Centre has been launched

In the Community Learning Centre competition awarded by the Community-Oriented Policy Project, Munkacsy László Róbert Institute and National School in Munkacsy, managed by the Magyar Charity Service, established a Learning Centre providing an excellent and quality learning environment for disadvantaged secondary school students coming from rural areas who are struggling with urban challenges.

• Anna Kocsis visited the newly opened Learning Centre in Munkacsy, which is the first of its kind in Hungary. The centre provides a safe and supportive environment for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The Learning Centre is managed by the Magyar Charity Service and provides a range of educational and social activities for students. The Learning Centre is managed by the Magyar Charity Service and provides a range of educational and social activities for students. The Learning Centre is managed by the Magyar Charity Service and provides a range of educational and social activities for students.

Catching Up 2.0

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Education

The Learning House of Vásárosnamény, launched in the fall of 2024, has become an important part of the lives of students from disadvantaged settlements who face urban challenges.

10

14

TELEMEDICINE

Next, please!

- I was a patient of the telemedicine service

How does a Maltese healthcare appointment differ from state healthcare? What kinds of services are carried out during a patient's first visit? And what exactly happens at the program's rural Health Point? We visited Nyírkáta, the center's Hungarian healthcare center of the Emergency Settlements (ESET) Program, to find out.

• Miklós Bencsik visited the telemedicine service in Nyírkáta, which provides remote healthcare services to patients in rural areas. The service is part of the Emergency Settlements (ESET) Program and aims to improve access to healthcare for disadvantaged communities. The telemedicine service is part of the Emergency Settlements (ESET) Program and aims to improve access to healthcare for disadvantaged communities. The telemedicine service is part of the Emergency Settlements (ESET) Program and aims to improve access to healthcare for disadvantaged communities.

14

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15

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26

RESPONSIBLE ANIMAL CARE

27

RESPONSIBLE ANIMAL CARE

Help is only a paw away

The staff of the Responsible Animal Care program assist in the care of animals in disadvantaged settlements. They work to ensure that the country's most disadvantaged settlements have access to quality animal care services. This is what is important.

• Miklós Bencsik visited the Responsible Animal Care program in Nyírkáta, which provides support and resources for pet owners in disadvantaged communities. The program aims to improve the welfare of animals and their owners. The Responsible Animal Care program is part of the Emergency Settlements (ESET) Program and aims to improve the welfare of animals and their owners. The Responsible Animal Care program is part of the Emergency Settlements (ESET) Program and aims to improve the welfare of animals and their owners.

Housing

Social rental housing is being established in 166 developing settlements. This time, we present the design and planning aspects of implementation — from property assessment to handover.

26

RESPONSIBLE PET OWNERSHIP

Staff members of the Responsible Pet Ownership department carry out their work in various disadvantaged settlements across the country. But what does such a field visit look like in practice — and why is their work so essential?

22

HOUSING

23

HOUSING

Architects for quality housing

Social housing is being developed in 166 emerging settlements. This time, we present the design side of the process, from property assessment to handover.

• Zoltán Balogh visited the design process for social housing in various settlements. The architects are working on the design and planning aspects of the housing units. The design process is part of the Emergency Settlements (ESET) Program and aims to improve the quality of social housing. The design process is part of the Emergency Settlements (ESET) Program and aims to improve the quality of social housing. The design process is part of the Emergency Settlements (ESET) Program and aims to improve the quality of social housing.

Freestyle FC mania in the catching-up settlements The Freestyle FC team is taking the catching-up settlements by storm. With hundreds of thousands of online followers, the freestyle football players have been touring the communities since February — much to the delight of local children. At each stop, the professional athletes put on a dazzling display of their best tricks, share some of their signature moves with young fans, and invite everyone to join the fast-paced Blazespot reaction game. The bravest participants can even test their skills in a one-on-one match against the pros. By the end of December, the team plans to visit ninety communities across the country, wrapping up their tour with a large celebration. → **Nationwide**



A shining success Dominik Botos and his band took the stage at the second Buda Street Music Festival in June, held at the Fény street market and surrounding areas. Passersby paused to listen as the young musicians performed near the FeteKert Café & Brunch and the Máltai Manufaktúra food truck, while even cars

slowed down to enjoy the soul-stirring music for a moment. Several members of the band previously studied at schools run by the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta, and all of them began their musical journey in the Maltese Symphony programme, where they learned the fundamentals of playing an instrument.. → **Buda**



From a catching-up settlement to the elite teams Zoltán Unyi, a member of the SZERVA SC team from Szécsény, secured third place in the junior competition held at BVSC in Budapest. The young athlete reached third place in the elite league after recording two losses and one victory. → **Budapest**





Expert help for a new family

A premature baby was recently born in Endrefalva. When staff from the Hungarian Baptist Aid visited the family, they noticed that the young mother struggled with the practical aspects of caring for her newborn. In response, the team from the Presence Point, together with the local district visiting nurse, began regular visits — often staying late into the evening — to guide the parents and help them build essential childcare skills. Today, the young mother confidently cares for her baby on her own, and both take part in the early childhood development activities organised by the Presence Point. → **Endrefalva**



Internal Development The training team of the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta is supporting the staff of the Emerging Settlements Programme through sensitivity training sessions. In the period up to the end of May, eight 40-hour courses were launched to familiarise staff working in the settlements with the Presence Methodology, an approach, which combines a broad set of tools designed to improve the living conditions of those in need and which introduces innovative practices suited to the complex nature of local interventions. During the training sessions, participants explored the theoretical foundations of the Presence Methodology, learned about field-specific assistance and communication techniques and acquired practical tools to strengthen local communities and implement targeted interventions effectively. → **Nationwide**



Europe Day On the occasion of Europe Day, the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta presented the results and ongoing development projects of the Emerging Settlements Programme, implemented with the support of both national and EU funds. Through a series of interactive sessions and discussions, visitors were able to gain a comprehensive overview of the progress achieved in Hungary's 300 most disadvantaged settlements. → **Budapest**

Circle of trust The Presence Point in Rinyaszentkirály is regularly visited by a social worker. András Kovács meets with local residents each month— alternating between sessions for young people and adults — to discuss issues affecting their daily lives. At the July meeting, the guests were mothers and grandmothers, and the conversation focused on the challenges of motherhood and finding a balance between family responsibilities and personal time. The session grew into a relaxed, open discussion, during which participants created a pie chart showing how they would ideally divide their time. → **Rinyaszentkirály**





Convergence 2.0

– Creating opportunities and values

"We believe that these settlements can be saved (...), proving that a determined community can achieve significant success," said Miklós Vecsei, Prime Ministerial Commissioner, in Nyírpilis at the opening event of the newest period of the programme launched to help the communities of the poorest villages to catch up.

✦ Attila Kálmán

On May 20, Nyírpilis hosted the opening event of the Presence in Catching-Up Settlements project. The event was intended to announce that the Emerging Settlements (Fete) Programme, launched in 2019, had reached a new phase, providing a unique opportunity to support and improve the lives of 300,000 people living in the poorest communities.

The next cycle will run until 2029, continuing the work of helping disadvantaged communities in the country to catch up. As the opening event, this work is being carried out with EU funds within the framework of Széchenyi Plan Plus Programme, under EFOP_PLUSZ-7.1.1-24-2024-00002 project, entitled Presence in Catching-Up Settlements (ESF+). The persistent work carried out for the communities of disadvantaged regions is difficult, but it is not a futile effort. This is clearly demonstrated by the results, which can already be measured in numbers, as confirmed by the speakers, including Miklós Vecsei, the Prime Ministerial Commissioner responsible for the programme, who emphasised that this programme is not a "settlement hospice" but one that creates added value.

The scale of the programme is well illustrated by the fact that last year the project was already running in 238 villages, with locations gradually joining since 2019 to reach a total of 300 by the end of 2025. The programme is implemented through the cooperation

of 28 church, charitable, and civil organisations, under the coordination of the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta. In each village, the centre of social work is the Presence Point run by an implementing organisation, where the various programme elements come together to help residents from pregnancy to old age. The programme is based on the Presence Programme of the Charity Service of the Order of Malta, which has been recognised with the Hungarian Heritage Award. The essence of the programme lies in the constant personal presence, whereby helping work becomes integrated in the everyday lives of the local community. The villages do not receive a pre-defined programme, but decisions are made based on local social diagnoses to remedy their problems.

In the auditorium of the János Balázs Primary School and Kindergarten of the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta, local students of the Maltese Symphony welcomed guests in Nyírpilis with a mini-concert. According to Mayor Márk Beri, 95 percent of the town's population is of Roma origin and lives in extreme poverty. The János Balázs Primary School and Kindergarten is attended by 160 pupils and 80 kindergarteners, while most of the adults are employed in the public work scheme and the rest work in local factories. This is why the programme means so much to Nyírpilis.





Zoltán Gyenes, Chief Economic Expert at the European Commission, emphasised that the European support that had often been desired throughout our history has now arrived. The EU is participating in the operation of Hungarian programmes, including FETE.

This project is a good example of the effective use of EU funds, and the support makes everyday life easier for many people. "We came to celebrate," said the expert, who expressed his gratitude to the professionals running the opportunity-enhancing programme.



Dr Edit Kovács, Deputy State Secretary for Social Opportunities, highlighted the tangible results of the process launched in 2019, noting how FETE programme has moved from being a vision to a fully functioning support system. In recent years, a network has been established that accompanies people in need from birth all the way to employment.

A major achievement is that certain elements of the FETE programme, including the tutoring centres (Tanoda), are now recognised as basic services. Education remains the key to breaking the cycle of poverty, helping children avoid following the same hopeless paths as their parents and equipping them with the skills to build a livelihood. There is hope that the next phase will bring further successes, strengthening the resilience and retention of these communities.

On-site Programmes

The all-day opening event in Nyírpilis took place at several locations in the village. During the day, guests could visit the school and kindergarten, as well as view programme elements operating at several locations in the village with the participation of the thematic leaders of the programme, such as the Maltese Symphony rehearsal, the fun play activities brought by the Mobile Playground, dog therapy sessions and the Freestyle FC football demonstration. In addition, guests were given an insight into the processes of early childhood support and learned about prevention areas. The Mobile Healthcare Center bringing health services to local communities as well as the Mobile Clinics performing dog neutering, vaccinations, and microchipping were also open to visitors.



Szilárd Lantos, director of the Model Programmes at the Charity Service of the Order of Malta, reflected on the early challenges of the Presence Programme 20 years ago, when it became clear that some situations could not be ignored. He emphasised that it is most important to build trust and maintain a constant presence in the everyday lives of families, sharing meaningful and memorable moments with

them. Government support combined with EU funding helps ensure continuity, because if a programme has to be suspended in a village, restarting often means beginning from scratch. Education plays a crucial role as well: knowledge equips children to care for themselves later in life, making it vital that as many as possible attend secondary school and earn a diploma.

This was followed by a panel discussion on the details, difficulties, and results of social work by Béla Rácz, President of IHungary Association, and Dr Tamás Eperjesi, chief professional advisor to the Charity Service of the Hungarian Reformed Church. The participants in the discussion, moderated by Dr Nándor Németh, head of model programme evaluation, also mentioned that relationship building is a key element as is continuity across development cycles, which helps people stay in the community.

Finally, Miklós Vecsei, Prime Ministerial Commissioner responsible for implementing the diagnosis-based catching-up strategy, gave a summary assessment. "We who run the programme believe that these villages can be saved," he said. The implementers have two missions: one is to maintain a continuous presence and work in the 300 settlements, and the other is to reach out to the "welfare balcony," to address the world where decisions are made. Fete is a state programme, financed by domestic and

EU funds, and serious state decisions were

needed to achieve the results that have already been achieved and those that are hoped for. He cited the construction of community solar power plants and the implementation of a telemedicine health network as successful examples. No programme has ever been in operation for such a long time. These settlements are capable of astonishingly rapid development, proving that a determined community can achieve significant success. Fete is a highly personalised programme, and it is not easy to operate. "But every encounter with a local community confirms that we are on the right track," said the Prime Ministerial Commissioner, adding, "This is a meaningful and effective programme, although we still have many miles to go, which we must travel together."



ReFarmerBank in schools

– Sustainability and Inclusion

During the 2024/25 school year, the ReFarmerBank team visited 11 schools, reaching around 2,500 students. Through these visits, students learned about the work taking place in the workshops of catching-up settlements, as well as topics like sustainability, social responsibility, and the benefits of mindful purchasing. They also had the chance to buy products made from recycled materials — crafted in the Tarpa sewing workshop — at very affordable prices.

✍ Mihály Bessenyei

Schoolchildren and their teachers bustle around the improvised stand, looking at and touching the ReFarmer products. Questions (or words of praise for the products) fly thick and fast at Szilvia Daskó Györgyné Szabó, the professional leader, who tries to answer every question with unwavering enthusiasm. The school had prepared well in advance for the arrival of the ReFarmerBank team, and the children had time to think about their questions, aided by a short presentation on environmental sustainability compiled by the staff of the Charity Service of the Order of Malta, which was included in the curriculum before the visit.

Szilvia Daskó Györgyné Szabó organised the ReFarmerBank programme in 11 schools during the 2024/25 school year, and she says she had a lot of positive experiences. "The young people I met are very interested in various recycled products and practices. They clearly care about protecting the environment and are open to conscious, socially-useful programmes such as ReFarmerBank."

Before the ReFarmer Bank team's arrival, a jeans collection campaign is organised in

each school, and the children receive points for the donated jeans, which they can use to purchase products from the Tarpa sewing workshop at lower prices (tailored to student budgets).

The most popular items are the various toiletry bags, belt bags, pencil cases, and shoulder bags. The sewing workshop employees also made products specifically for students. For example, the summer-start hit products were bags decorated with heart-shaped denim patches.

During the denim collection campaigns, students and their teachers collected approximately 1,200 pieces of denim for the ReFarmerBank Programme. By doing so, they become part of a sustainable cycle, the next stage of which is in Tarpa, where new products are made from the donated jeans, and which, in turn, provides work in the marginalised community supported by the Charity Service of the Order of Malta.

The Tarpa sewing workshop was founded in 2021. Currently, three skilled seamstresses and three trained employees work in the sewing workshop.



Hungary’s first Community Learning Centre has been launched

Growing attention, shrinking distances

In the Community Learning Centre competition announced by the Community-Oriented Pedagogy Project, Menyhért Lónyay Baptist Technicum and Vocational School in Vásárosnamény, managed by the Baptist Charity Service, established a Learning Centre providing new experiences and quality leisure time for disadvantaged secondary school students coming from rural areas who are struggling with urban challenges.

✍ Eszter Szakácsi

Thanks to the steady increase in educational support and a strong on-the-ground Presence in recent years, dropout rates among children living in catching-up settlements have decreased sharply. Today, almost all students complete primary school. However, those who go on to study in urban secondary schools face a new and unfamiliar challenge — having to adjust to a completely different environment.

For young people and their parents, who are used to quiet, often traffic-free settlements, even the pace of a small town can feel overwhelming. Many find the daily commute intimidating, and parents often struggle with letting their children travel alone. Beyond these challenges, secondary schools also pose higher expectations. Added to which come personal and family difficulties — financial strain, long travel times, adapting to boarding school life, and sometimes even facing a hostile or hurtful school atmosphere. All of this can weigh heavily on teenagers. Over time, these constant and often compounding pressures can lead to a loss of motivation, more frequent absences, and eventually dropping out of school altogether. It’s at this critical point that the Learning Centre steps in to support them.

The Learning Centre — still a relatively new service in Hungary — offers teenagers a safe and meaningful alternative to spending their afternoons in shopping



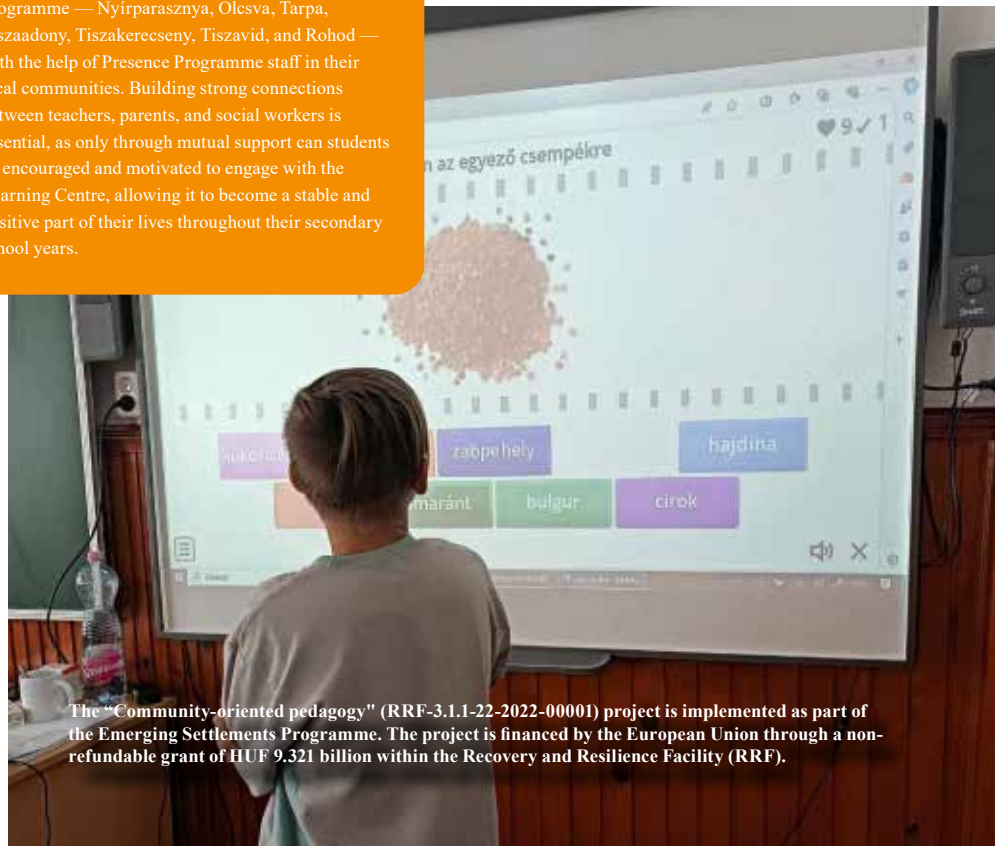


The first swallows

The Vásárosnamény Learning Centre opened its doors in the autumn of 2024 with twenty students, who took part in a community-building and career-orientation camp called “Knocking on the Learning Centre’s Door.” The participants came from seven villages included in the Emerging Settlements Programme — Nyírparasznya, Olesva, Tarpa, Tiszaadony, Tiszakerecseny, Tiszavid, and Rohod — with the help of Presence Programme staff in their local communities. Building strong connections between teachers, parents, and social workers is essential, as only through mutual support can students be encouraged and motivated to engage with the Learning Centre, allowing it to become a stable and positive part of their lives throughout their secondary school years.

malls or parks. For secondary school students who arrive in the early afternoon, the centre provides a variety of activities tailored to their interests and talents, including sports, music, visual arts, and cultural programmes. They also receive help with homework and guidance on navigating school life and the challenges of living in an urban environment.

Launched in the autumn of 2024, the Learning Centre in Vásárosnamény has quickly become an important part of local students’ lives. Thanks to the efforts of the animators, teachers, and local professionals, the centre offers a friendly, welcoming space where teenagers enjoy spending time and regularly take part in the programmes organised there. The animators make a conscious effort to understand and respond to the students’ needs, with flexibility playing a key role in their success. The main goal has been to create a safe and calm environment for spending the afternoons — one that also offers opportunities for learning and personal growth — and ultimately helps prevent students from dropping out of secondary school. In line with the project’s principles, the animators also maintain close contact with the parents, working hand in hand with the local Presence Point staff.



The “Community-oriented pedagogy” (RRF-3.1.1-22-2022-00001) project is implemented as part of the Emerging Settlements Programme. The project is financed by the European Union through a non-refundable grant of HUF 9.321 billion within the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF).

Teacher shortage? Check!

In Tiszabó, one of the poorest towns in the country, teachers are educating their own successors from among their former talented students. The recipe for success comes from the primary school of the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta.

✦ Krisztina Hámon

In class 5C in Tiszabó Primary School, there is complete silence as the children lean over their textbooks, reading the description of onions and underlining the parts of the text that seem important, with coloured markers. When everyone is finished, they discuss what each of them found important and copy the list of information into their notebooks. Standing at the teacher's desk is 23-year-old István Mága, a second-year student at the Teacher Training College of Jászberény. He knows the children well and gets along with them easily, as he has been with them every day since their first year as an assistant teacher, and he himself grew up in Tiszabó.

In the neighbouring classroom, class 5A is having an environmental studies lesson, taught by Zsolt Mányi, who attends the Teacher Training College in Szarvas. He is

now drawing a tomato on the blackboard. What are the parts of the plant? What does the root look like? Is it herbaceous or woody? How many tomatoes would you like me to put on the stem? The children are diligently drawing what they can see on the blackboard in their notebooks.

At the other end of the corridor, class 5B is learning about natural numbers. The class teacher, Roland Demeter, livens up the tired children with a movement exercise: if the number written on the board has the digit 1, they have to clap their hands; if it has the digit 2, they have to bang on the table; and if it has the digit 5, they have to snap their fingers. The task only seems simple; to do it well, it requires concentration, but high praise is given in return. Roland is teaching now, but on other days, he is a student himself, attending the Teacher Training





College in Szarvas together with Zsolt Mányi. There are a surprising number of young people on the teaching staff at the Tiszabó Primary School. As principal Judit Kubicssek explains, this was not always the case: *"In 2016, when the School Foundation of the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta took over the school, it was one of the worst schools in the country. There were few qualified teachers, and due to teacher shortages and prejudices against the Roma, it was difficult to recruit new colleagues, and they often left after a short time. Experience has shown that how well someone gets along with children does not depend on their qualifications; there was a teacher with three degrees who could not even teach a single lesson. In Tiszabó, children do not cooperate with teachers because of their authority. They sense when someone does not accept or looks down on them, but they will move heaven and earth for those they love.*

Necessity forced teachers to start recruiting teaching assistants from among the talented young people in the village who had graduated from secondary school in order to reduce their

workload. In the mid-2010s, there were only one or two young people with secondary school certificates in the village, but over the years, their number has grown to a dozen and a half. Most of them were given the opportunity by the teaching staff to try out working for the school, and those who enjoyed it were able to complete a one-year, state-recognised teaching assistant training course with the financial support of the School Foundation of the Charity Service of the Order of Malta. The most determined were able to continue their studies at the Jászberény Campus of the Faculty of Education at Károly Eszterházy Catholic University or at the Faculty of Education at Gál Ferenc University in Szarvas to become certified primary school teachers.

This is the path taken by Balázs Adrián Mága, the brother of the aforementioned István Mága. He studied in the nearby small town of Fegyvernek and initially visited Tiszabó Primary School occasionally, only to capture the school's festive moments as a self-taught photographer. The teaching staff noticed his talent, and soon he was managing the school's IT system, and, at the same time, he obtained his system administrator qualification. He is currently in his second year at the Teacher Training College in Szarvas, and in Tiszabó, he programmes LEGO robots with 3rd and 4th graders in technology class, while teaching older students how to use Word, Excel, and PowerPoint in extracurricular activities. The children eagerly look forward to his classes.

Many young people from the surrounding area work at the Tiszabó Primary School, some as primary school teachers, others as teaching assistants. The teaching staff do everything they can to help the young people succeed, and the older teachers are happy to help them write lesson plans, as they consider it a shared goal to help them earn their degrees. The arrival of young people has revived the life of the teaching staff; there is a colleague in her forties who, inspired by their good example, has returned to study.

And what happens if someone decides to leave the school in Tiszabó after graduating and continue their career elsewhere? Principal Judit Kubicssek's answer is surprising: *"The goal is not for these young people to stay with us forever. If they get a job elsewhere with this professional experience and degree, that will be our greatest success. Plus, that way we will have room and opportunity to give other talented young people a chance."*

Next, please!

- I was a patient of the telemedicine service

How does a Maltese healthcare appointment differ from state healthcare? What kinds of tests are carried out during a patient's first visit? And what exactly happens at the programme's rural Health Points? We visited Nyírkáta, the eastern Hungarian healthcare centre of the Emerging Settlements (FETE) Programme, to find out.

✍ Mihály Bessenyei

"Hello, my name is Tamás Kertész. I'm calling because it's February already, and it is time for you to have a blood test and an ultrasound, which we could do this week, on Thursday. Okay, if I'm correct, it will be an abdominal ultrasound, so you should come on an empty stomach, don't eat anything beforehand, just drink plenty of water. We can do the blood test tomorrow. Okay, then we'll see you tomorrow at 9 a.m. for the blood test and on Thursday at 10 a.m. for the ultrasound. Have a nice day!"

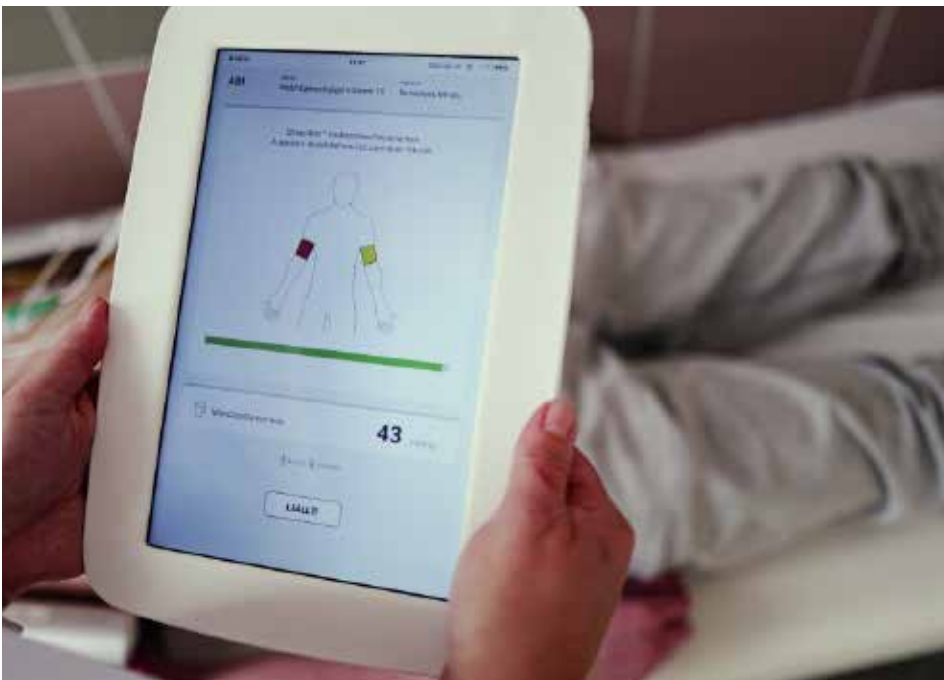
This phone conversation took place at the GP's office in Nyírkáta, in one of the rooms reserved for the Maltese Health Point. My colleague and I travelled here to find out how a Maltese healthcare appointment differs from a regular one, who the patients are, what health problems they seek help for at the Health Point, and how the professionals working here help them.

By the end of the day, not only had these questions been answered, but I also had the opportunity to experience firsthand a medical examination that I can confidently call the most accurate, modern, and, without a doubt, friendliest medical examination of my short life.

Nyírkáta is a town of 2,000 inhabitants located in the eastern part of the country, on the edge of the Nyírség region.

In 2019, the village was among the first to join the Emerging Settlements Programme, and its Presence Point has been run by the Hungarian Maltese Charity Service ever since. Due to the high population, the peripheral location of the settlement and the extent of the daily difficulties experienced here, one of the permanent rural centres of the national telemedicine programme was established in the settlement.

My colleague and I left Budapest early





Two and a half years of caring for patients

The Attila Naszldy Health Development Programme, launched by the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta with EU support, has now been running for just over two and a half years. During this time, it has treated 16,101 patients across 38 disadvantaged villages, many of which had been without a GP for years. A 1,700-square-metre health centre was built in Bicske with EU funding, housing a telemedicine centre, a laboratory, a pharmaceutical supply hub for personalised care, and the offices and logistical facilities needed for coordination. The programme also operates 14 Mobile health units that visit villages, with medical assistants performing instrumental examinations on-site under the guidance of doctors connected via telemedicine.

in the morning, and now I am sitting in the Health Point office with a mug of strong coffee in my hand, talking about my grandfather's health to nurse Katalin Szendreiné Császári, who is sitting opposite me. We did not end up here out of mere friendly curiosity; the health condition of the elderly Mihály Bessenyei came up as part of the preliminary examination that is mandatory for all patients. This minimum 40-minute medical history discussion is the gateway to the Maltese healthcare system, and the conversation here is a combination of friendly chat and a deeply professional health assessment. Personal questions are followed by a comprehensive family medical history, covering who suffers (or has suffered) from what and when. This is how we got to my late grandfather.

The nurse asking the questions carefully observes the patient during the guided conversation, as an experienced healthcare professional, she is familiar with many small signs of the body that may indicate illness or disorder. If any such sign is encountered, they ask a few clarifying questions or touch

on topics that the patient may have forgotten or not considered important to mention, thus ensuring that the clinical picture is as complete as possible. While analysing my life, there was still time for other things. They recorded my official data required for telemedicine appointments, my social security number, and my address card details. Within minutes, I was entered into the system, and by the end of the preliminary examination, I had become an official patient of the Maltese healthcare service.

After going through the medical history, they measured my blood pressure on both arms, clipped a pulse oximeter onto my finger, and measured my blood oxygen level, then sent me on to the official medical appointment. The first thing I noticed when I entered the doctor's office was an open laptop on the table, and the doctor who was supposed to conduct my examination greeted me from her screen. From Kecskemét, 300 kilometres away. This is the essence of telemedicine care: thanks to special equipment and a well-trained assistant, the doctor can conduct the examination from their own home, what is more, in the case of



she was analysing them, the assistant pricked my finger, put the vial filled with my blood into a grey box, pressed a few buttons, and the box immediately began to hum and buzz softly as it analysed my CRP level. This test can determine whether there is inflammation in the body. Like the other instruments here, the machine is first-class, fast, and accurate, and it automatically transmits the results of the laboratory tests, taking only a few minutes, to the central system.

This was followed by the bogeyman of medical offices, the "serious" venous blood draw, which even adults often fear a little. As an experienced blood donor (I have type O blood, which is very popular at blood donation centres), I have some experience with the various tricks and customs of blood collection. I have been in the hands of gentle pacifists, but I have also been on the wrong side of the needle. This blood draw was undoubtedly one of the top five, as medical assistant Mrs Lászlóné Agócs was quick, precise, and calm, and even took the time to compliment my long arms, which, let's face it, everyone likes to hear. She placed the blood she had drawn in a secure storage unit and then regretfully informed me that the results of my lab tests would not be ready until tomorrow. The blood will be transported to the laboratory centre in Bicske in the afternoon, because they can perform more complex analyses there, but I shouldn't worry, my results will be uploaded to the EESZT (National E-Health Infrastructure) tomorrow.

An important element of the programme is that people living in disadvantaged communities have access to the highest possible level of healthcare. They try to perform most of the tests in-house to avoid the problems caused by queuing, travelling, and the slow turnaround times typical of large systems.

We reach the end of the appointment, and the findings and data collected over the past two hours are lined up in front of the doctor, who hums, thinks, and then declares: It looks like I'll be staying around for a while. I get up from the table with relief, say goodbye, and head for my car parked outside. As I step out into the courtyard, I can hear Mrs Laszlóné Agócs, the medical assistant, calling from the office: Next, please!

It is good to feel that little warmth in the morning

Launched to support families in disadvantaged communities, the Green Heating Programme ran its first season in the spring of 2025. Its ultimate goal is to ensure that every family raising children should have at least one safely heated room. In the first season, a thousand families received monthly support from the energy generated by the twenty solar power plants of the Foundation of the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta. Homes were fitted with safe sockets and modern heating panels, and support is credited directly to newly installed prepaid meters. The programme will continue in the 2025/2026 heating season.

Krisztina Hámon

The Lakatos family lives on the outskirts of Tiszanána in a house owned by the local government. Twelve people live under one roof, four generations from great-grandfather to toddler. As part of the Green Heating Programme, in October 2024, they were able to take home an electric heating panel from the Charity Service of the Order of Malta, which was installed in the room of the eldest son, Sándor Lakatos. The small room was added to the house later so that the boy would have a few square meters of space where he could study in peace and fit his bed and desk. The family is very proud of his intelligence; he is preparing to attend István Dobó Secondary School in Eger, where he will study English and mathematics. However, it was not easy to stay in the room during the winter months. Only a little warmth crept in through the open kitchen door, and without heating, his hands quickly became numb while studying. At night, he had to huddle under the blanket in sweater and sweatpants. However, with the electric heating panel provided as part of the programme, the room can now be heated to 23 degrees in just 15 minutes.

The Horváth family lives on the other side of Tiszanána. With the aid they receive from the Green Heating programme, they heat their living room, where the grandparents sleep with their two grandchildren at night. They used to use a stove, but it was not easy to keep the poorly insulated house warm; in the morning, when the alarm clock rang, it was usually so cold that it was difficult to get their little granddaughter out of bed when it was time to go to kindergarten. The heating panel was placed between the grandparents' and the little girl's beds, so when they wake up, all they have





to do is reach under the blanket, press the button, and within a few minutes, the room warms up. "It's nice and warm in the morning when I dress Maja," says Csabáné Horváth, the grandmother, with satisfaction.

Similar to the Lakatos and Horváth families, a thousand families in need received Green Heating subsidies in nearly three hundred disadvantaged communities across the country during the 2024/2025 heating season. As part of the programme, each family received a 2000W electric heating panel, and from October to April, the Foundation of the Charity Service of the Order of Malta provided them with a total of HUF 120,000 worth of recharge codes on a monthly basis so that they could top up their prepaid electricity meters. As the electrical system in the participating settlements is often outdated and dangerous, a safe electrical socket was also installed in the home of each family selected for the

Green Heating Programme, and the electric heating panels must be plugged into these sockets to ensure complete safety.

The energy used in the Green Heating Programme comes indirectly from renewable energy sources. The Charity Service of the Order of Malta operates a total of twenty solar power plants with a capacity of 12,513 kWp in 19 catching-up settlements across the country. The charity organisation used the income from the sale of the energy produced here in the form of heating subsidies to families in need with young children living in catching-up settlements.

In the 2024/2025 heating season, a thousand families received heating subsidies, representing a total of 2,453 children and 2,166 adults. The Charity Service of the Order of Malta will continue the programme in the 2025/2026 heating season, and the call for applications has already been announced, ensuring heated rooms for more families this winter.



The "Community renewable energy production and use" (RRF-3.4.1-22-2022-00001) project is implemented as part of the Emerging Settlements Programme. The project is financed by the European Union through a non-refundable grant of HUF 12.919 billion within the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF).



Training Programmes for Presence Programme Staff

2019 31

2020 36

2021 51

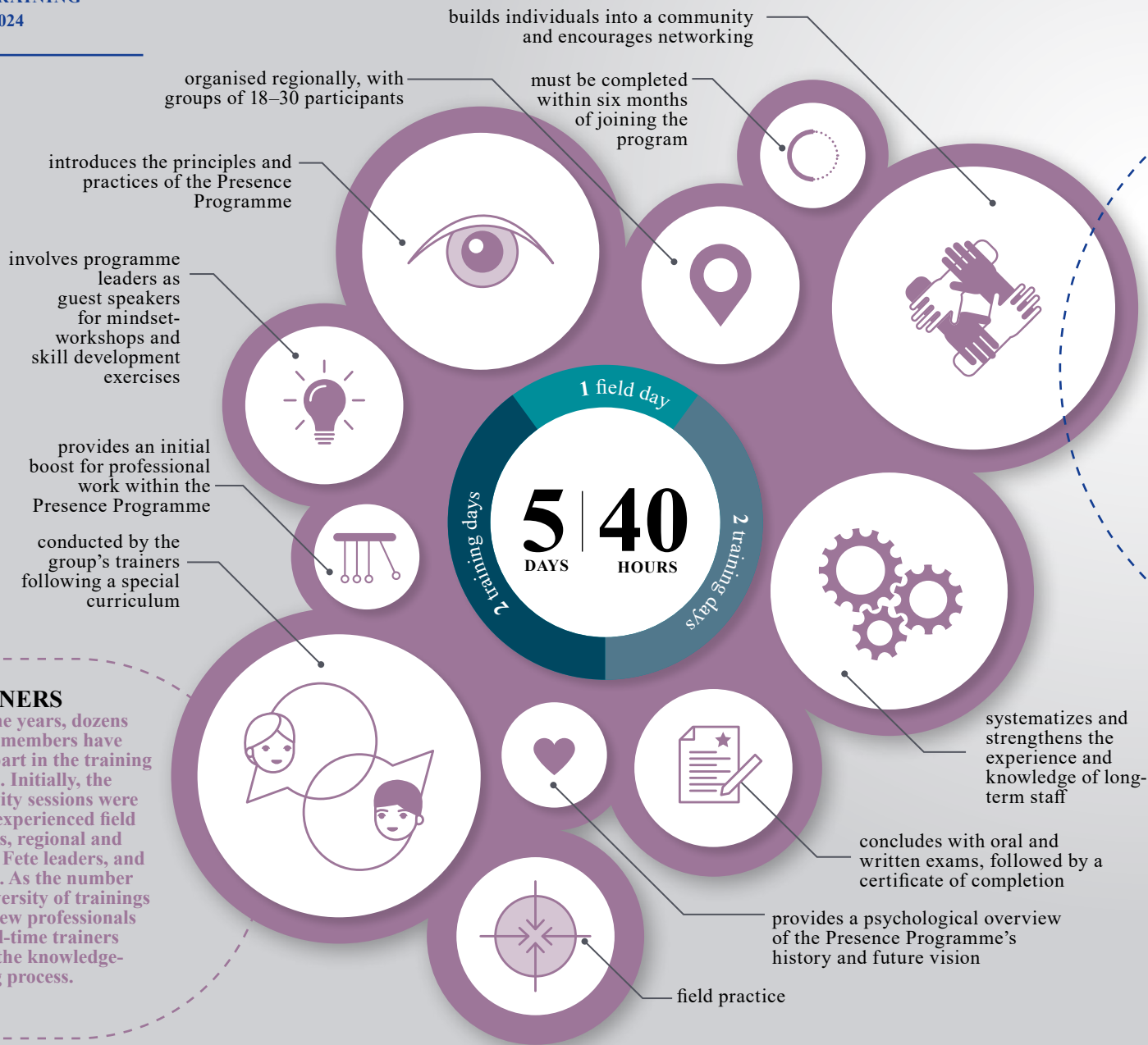
2023 60

2024 62

NUMBER OF MUNICIPALITIES JOINING FETE AND THE TRAINING 2019 - 2024

Within the Emerging Settlements (Fete) programme, special attention is given to the continuous training of staff working at the Presence Points. This multi-level, interlinked educational structure is based on the Presence Methodology developed by the Hungarian Maltese Charity Service over the past twenty years, ensuring the programmes's effective implementation. Most trainings are held at Fete's regional centers; however, shorter and smaller thematic days are organized locally, adapted to the groups of settlements to make participation easier for the staff. It is crucial for the national inclusion programme that every Presence Point is represented in the training process. All staff members of the Presence Programme participate, and new colleagues from newly joined settlements are continuously integrated into this professional development system.

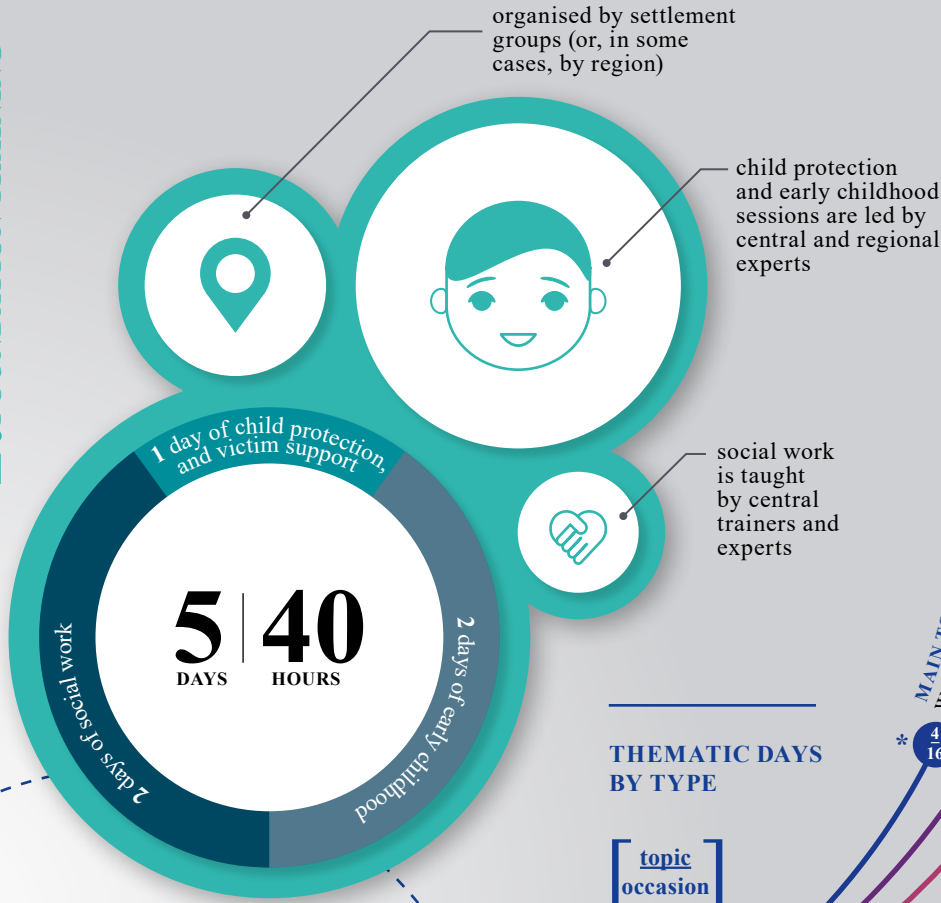
1. SENSITIVITY TRAINING USING PRESENCE METHODOLOGY



TRAINERS

Over the years, dozens of staff members have taken part in the training process. Initially, the sensitivity sessions were led by experienced field workers, regional and central Fete leaders, and experts. As the number and diversity of trainings grew, new professionals and full-time trainers joined the knowledge-sharing process.

PRESENCE PROGRAMME -
2. FOUNDATION TRAINING



Training Phases

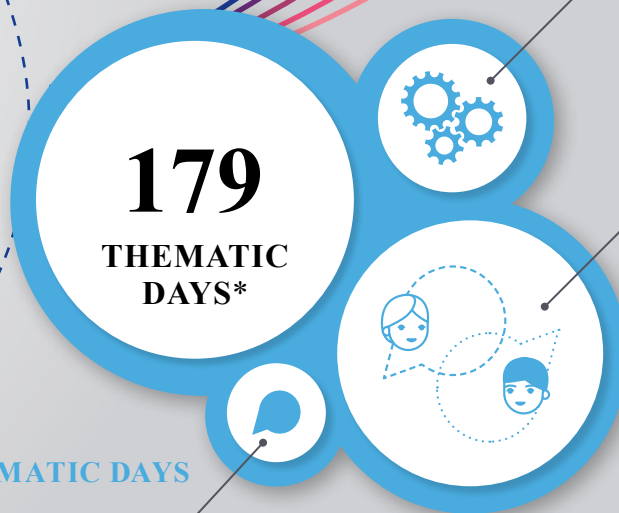
Trainings are held according to a professional plan along **three mandatory components** within the framework of project EFOP_PLUSZ-7.1.1-24-2024-00002

1. AWARENESS TRAINING – WITH PRESENCE METHODOLOGY
2. PRESENCE PROGRAMME - FOUNDATION TRAINING
3. THEMATIC DAYS

3. THEMATIC DAYS

THEMATIC DAYS BY TYPE

[topic occasion]



system of thematic days covering the entire range of activities is being developed in cooperation with the regions and professional departments

special thematic days are conducted by professional colleagues, while the training team is responsible for organisation

current topics: drug prevention, mobile playground, victim support, youth group organisation

| | | NUMBER OF TRAININGS | TOTAL NUMBER OF TRAININGS | NUMBER OF GRADUATES | NET TIME INVESTMENT OF GRADUATES |
|--|-------|---------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------|
| 40-HOUR SENSITIVITY TRAINING, DATA BROKEN DOWN BY YEAR | 2021 | 11 | 440 | 195 | 7.920 |
| | 2022 | 2 | 80 | 47 | 1.880 |
| | 2023 | 11 | 440 | 274 | 10.960 |
| | 2024 | 7 | 280 | 155 | 6.200 |
| | 2025* | 7 | 280 | 161 | 6.440 |

*until 30.06.2025.



MAIN TOPICS: drug prevention, play as a tool of social work, child protection alert system

MAIN TOPICS: drug prevention, crisis, becoming a victim

MAIN TOPICS: drug prevention, working with youth groups, victim support and child protection

MAIN TOPICS: drug prevention, working with youth groups, victim support and child protection

MAIN TOPICS: PLAY, CRISIS AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Architects for quality housing

Social housing is being developed in 166 catching-up settlements. This time, we present the design side of the project, from property assessment to handover.



✦ Zoltán Balogh

An increasing number of social housing units are being developed as part of the Emerging Settlements (FETE) programme, often through the renovation of existing homes, though new houses are also being built. These properties are primarily offered to families living in poor conditions, and because they meet modern standards in every respect, they represent a significant step forward for those in disadvantaged circumstances.

The Charity Service of the Order of Malta, which manages the programme, has so far completed 139 rental apartments. Construction is ongoing in 192 properties, while preparations works are underway in an additional 261 buildings. Other civil society organisations are also contributing, creating social rental apartments in 63 more properties. Funded by the European Union, the programme will provide social rental housing in a total of 166 settlements. Following the open calls for proposals completed so far, by September 2025, 100 families — a total of 356 people, including 212 adults and 144 children — will be able to start a new life in homes that offer a modern and healthy living environment.

But how are the renovations actually progressing, and what steps come before construction begins? Three architects — Márton Benedek, the project's technical manager, and Balázs Juhász and Alida Szakolczai, the two lead architects — give us an inside look at the process.

In each municipality, the process begins with preparing an action plan based on actual needs, followed by selecting suitable properties, appraising them, and completing their purchase. Once this is done, public procurement procedures and planning take place, paving the way for renovations and new construction. Since the project mainly focuses on purchasing vacant properties, there are generally no issues with occupancy after the sale. Cases where unclear ownership or outstanding debts complicate the process are fortunately rare.

In the programme, a team of nearly 40 people is responsible for planning and technical inspection. Among others, architects, utility designers, structural engineers, surveyors, mechanical and electrical engineers, and fire safety experts are working to ensure that tenants can move into



Application Requirements

Tenants can obtain apartments through open calls for proposals announced in the catching-up settlements. Conditions include regular income from employment, timely payment of rent and utilities, and maintaining a tidy environment. In this case, families can stay in the property for five years, during which time they can get back on their feet and then move into independent rental accommodation or their own property, at which time a new offer will be announced for social rental housing for other families.



liveable homes after construction. When forming the team of full-time and part-time employees, studies, research, and work experience related to solidarity architecture, as well as social sensitivity and previous volunteer work, were considered advantages during the recruitment process. Recruitment was also facilitated by the connection with the Social Housing Workshop of the Faculty of Residential Building Design at the Budapest University of Technology and Economics.

When renovating, the team must consider the different characteristics and technical conditions of the buildings, as well as whether they are condominiums or detached family homes. The top priority is ensuring that social housing is safe and sustainable. Designers work with a variety of structures — from traditional farmhouses made of adobe or brick to the square-shaped Kádár cube, one of the most common types of countryside homes. For mobility properties typically located in district centres, plans are also drawn up for apartments in four- or ten-story buildings.

To make the most of design time, budgets, and financial resources, the experts focus on including buildings that do not have serious structural issues. However, some properties are chosen for their strategic locations or especially reasonable prices, and the team is fully prepared to plan these as well. The programme runs smoothly, aided by the fact that, with only a few exceptions, neighbours in apartment buildings are cooperative and welcome the improvements to their environment.

During renovation work, the rooms are repainted, the doors and windows are modernised, new sanitary

facilities are installed where necessary, the entire electrical network of the properties is replaced, and the chimneys are completely modernised in accordance with official regulations. In addition, all structural defects are repaired and restored using the necessary technology. For example, in the case of adobe structures, attention is paid to the use of "breathable" plasters and paints, or drying plasters are used on damp walls, and so on.

When building new houses, a sample design and two experimental model homes are implemented. The first seven new builds were completed in Karancsság, Nógrád County, in December 2024, and tenants have already moved in. The next four houses were constructed in Tiszabő, with applications for these opening in early October 2025, and preparations for several other investments are well underway.

The lightweight houses, ranging from 49 to 67 square metres, feature a bathroom, kitchen-dining-living area, two bedrooms, a built-in hallway cupboard, kitchen furniture, an electric stove, electric boiler, and a wood-burning fireplace. The three larger houses also include air conditioning providing heating and cooling. Thanks to modern insulation and other energy-efficient solutions, these homes have near-zero energy consumption. Each building is separated from neighbouring properties and public areas by fences, with yards converted into gravel parking lots and gardens suitable for planting. Electricity is supplied via prepaid meters in both renovated and newly built homes, ensuring a secure supply, encouraging economical consumption, and eliminating utility debt.



The "Construction, renovation of social housing and improvement of housing conditions" (RRF-3.3.1-22-2022-00001) project is implemented as part of the Emerging Settlements Programme. The project is financed by the European Union through a non-refundable grant of HUF 50.896 billion within the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF).

Musical moments

– The magic of melody



In Nyírvasvár, Csököly, Baktakék, and Karancsság, a total of nearly 400 student musicians from 27 towns in eight counties gave a regional end-of-year concert in early June. The first event was enriched by a joint performance with the Danubia Orchestra.

✍ Attila Kálmán

How can a primary school gym be transformed into a music palace for a few hours? Well, the only answer to this question could come from the student musicians who, before the start of the summer holidays, showed off their instrumental and vocal skills to their audience at a regional end-of-year concert in the first half of June.

In Nyírvasvár, Csököly, Baktakék and Karancsság, primary school students from the most disadvantaged settlements performed, who learn music in communities in the Emerging Settlements Programme (Fete). The talented children, who year after year play the guitar, violin and other instruments, sing and dance, produce melodies that are remarkable in themselves. And although the venues, which were converted from gyms and school lobbies into temporary concert halls, cannot compare to the ornate carvings and monumental staircases of the Academy of Music or the Hungarian State Opera House,



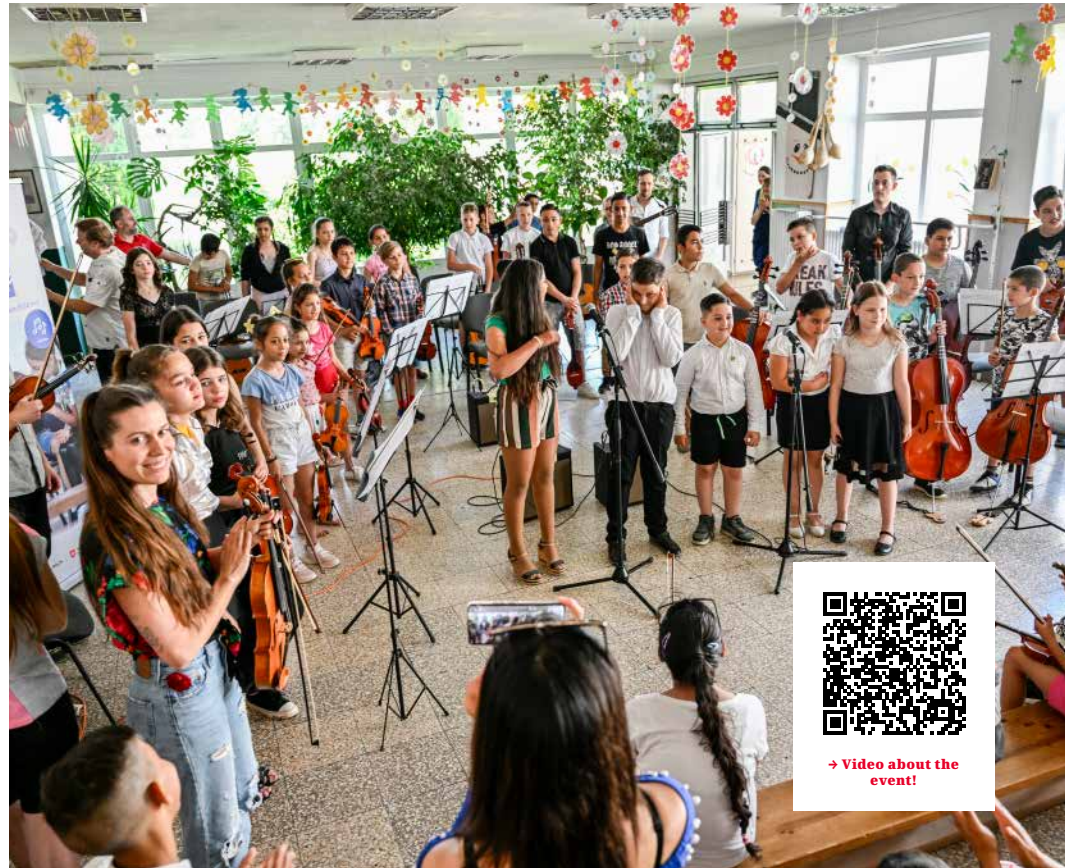
The regional end-of-year concerts were held with the funding of the European Union, as part of the Széchenyi Plan Plus Programme, under the Presence in Catching-Up Settlements (ESF+) project EFOP_PLUSZ-7.1.1-24-2024-00002.

the young musicians provided the same experience as if they were playing in front of the audiences of those fine institutions, with their unseen but all-the-more-audible, energetic, enthusiastic, and joyful music.

The first event on June 3 had another special aspect. How many young music students, especially those living in the poorest settlements, have the opportunity to perform in front of their parents, schoolmates and teachers on the same stage in a joint concert with one of Hungary's most prestigious symphony orchestras, conducted by the conductor of the Opera House, spiced up by his occasional professional instructions? Such performances offer an extraordinary and powerful experience for the children as well as the audience. In Nyírvasvár, 110 young musicians took to the stage with the Danubia Orchestra and conductor Máté Hámori, Art Director of the Danubia Orchestra. The young musicians came from ten settlements in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg and Hajdú-Bihar counties.

Community music teaching has already been incorporated into social work in several locations in lagging behind villages, with the Maltese Symphony laying the professional foundations. Its motto speaks for itself: "Joyful music now, solfège lessons later..." In this way, disadvantaged school children quickly learn to play their instruments with enthusiasm and, after their first attempts, are able to play competently and even perform in front of larger audiences. The regular rehearsals and concerts throughout the year and at the end of the school year have an impact on their personalities and school results, and can even help them choose their career paths.

As Péter Török, the organiser of the Maltese Symphony Orchestra and community, told us during the interval at the concert in Nyírvasvár, that the programme differs fundamentally from traditional music education and school music lessons. The latter does not include any instrument instruction, while the former differs in other respects. Children are allowed to start playing instruments much earlier, making it much easier to combine theory with practice. Music is a means of expression, so folk songs, authentic gypsy music, and other genres of serious and light music can coexist. Where possible, children are taught



to play several types of instruments, such as percussion, string, and plucked instruments. They have singing as well as dance students, and most recently, they have also been experimenting with the genre of rap.

But how did the Danubia Orchestra end up in Nyírvasvár? The internationally renowned ensemble is by no means unknown in catching-up settlements. One of its missions is to support the artistic integration of the most disadvantaged young people through its programme, Common Sound, which has been running for years and was established in 2013 together with the Maltese Symphony Orchestra.

When we asked him about it, Máté Hámori emphasised that community music education in the towns is provided by the Maltese Symphony Orchestra, while the Danubia Orchestra "complements this and provides a kind of motivation for the children." Although their primary goal is not talent development, it is important to spend time with young people, which is a shared journey towards music and each other. To show that with hard work and perseverance, it is indeed possible to build a future. That is why they give joint concerts

with the children in the settlements. The best of them have also been performing with the orchestra at the Academy of Music for a many years. Their future individual paths and possible musical careers indeed depend on many other factors. Their success is well demonstrated by the fact that Máté Hámori and the Danubia Orchestra were awarded the Presence Award in 2025 for the Common Sound programme.

The next stop for this year's end-of-year concerts was the primary school in Csököly, in southern Transdanubia, where around 100 young students from seven towns in Baranya, Fejér, Somogy, and Tolna counties showed off their musical skills on June 5. Their performance featured melodies from a variety of genres, ranging from authentic Gypsy music to folk songs and even Bagossy Brothers' hits.

In addition to the concerts in Nyírvasvár and Csököly, Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén and Nógrád counties presented themselves independently, representing five towns each. On June 5, one hundred student musicians performed in Baktakék, followed by seventy in Karancsság on June 13, creating a festive atmosphere within the school walls.

Help is only a paw away

The staff of the Responsible Animal Ownership programme has sterilised, vaccinated, and microchipped nearly 3,600 dogs in 30 under-served communities. Thanks to their dedication, 274 dogs have also found new homes in recent years. They work in some of the country's most disadvantaged areas – but what does that actually look like in practice, and why is this work so important?

✍ Mihály Bessenyei

"Pets must be kept in such circumstances that allow for their natural behaviour, but at the same time do not cause any lasting or unnecessary disturbance to the established lifestyle and customs of the surrounding community" (Government Decree 41/2010 (II. 26.) Section 14(2)). This sounds great on paper, but reality often beats legislation, and this is especially true in catching-up settlements.

On the one hand, dogs are still regarded as farm animals in rural areas, where they are the obvious solution for keeping two-legged and four-legged thieves at bay, even in places where there is enough money for electronic security systems. On the other hand, dogs – as everywhere else – are a familiar part of family life, whether guarding the house or playing with the children.

However, where firewood may run out in the middle of the month, and the question is what the children will have for dinner, Morzsi dog's well-being, health, and neutering are not a priority. The result: after a while, the dog becomes a stray, and in some cases, self-sufficient. This process is accelerated by fences that are broken or completely missing. The Responsible Animal Ownership team was formed in 2019 to reduce stray dog population. After its formation, its members began collecting and rehoming stray dogs roaming the settlement, and soon after, they also began neutering dogs with owners. Responsible Animal Ownership joined the 2019 Emerging Settlements Programme as a separate field of expertise and extended its assistance to the communities participating in the programme. Over the past five years,



thousands of dogs have been neutered, vaccinated and microchipped, and in the spirit of building trust between dogs and humans, animal-assisted activities have been organised for primary school and preschool children living in the participating communities.

A day full of dogs in Tiszabura

Farmers arrive one after another at the neutering/vaccination station set up in the courtyard of the Presence Point in Tiszabura. Some carry their animals in their arms, others on a leash, some in discarded prams or bicycle baskets, the dogs sometimes growling, sometimes whimpering, but mostly looking around with cheerful curiosity. Meanwhile, the dog transporter of the Charity Service of the Order of Malta cruises around the village, collecting dogs whose owners have indicated in advance that they need help with transportation. It is morning, so it is mainly mothers with small children and young people who bring their dogs. The mothers chat with each other and with the local staff of the Charity Service of the Order of Malta, while the children play in the garden of the Presence Point, waiting for their dogs to be treated. Everyone is

clearly familiar with the routine, as this is the third time that the Responsible Animal Ownership staff have visited the village, and their expertise and friendly manner are well known among the villagers. In addition, just as before every visit, the "district" specialist staff visited dog owners weeks in advance (covering almost every household in Tiszabura) to begin recruiting and to explain the expected process.

It is clear at first glance that the specialist staff working on site are a smoothly running team. One of them welcomes the owner and begins to fill out the Pet Health Book, which, in this case, is brand new for all participating dogs. This mandatory booklet contains the dog owner's name, contact details, the animal's place of residence, breed, date of birth, sex, colour, and name, and at the end of the examination, the serial number of the implanted chip and the date of neutering.

The neutering station consists of two converted minibuses and a metal operating table set up between them. In one bus, the dogs wait in cages before the operation and then rest after the procedure, while the other is a professional clinic where the team's veterinarian works. He works tirelessly, whether it's a small Chihuahua growling suspiciously or a huge village sheepdog

moving slowly, he handles them one by one without any problems (or bites). The assistants working alongside him are also busy: some are calming the dogs, some shave them before surgery, and some tend to the emotional well-being of dogs that have undergone surgery. The clinic is open-air, so every owner can check on their dog's condition. But it's not just about watching, it's also about asking questions. The Responsible Animal Ownership staff are there to sincerely and gladly answer any questions, thereby dispelling any lingering doubts. When a dog wakes up in the recovery cage after surgery, the owner can take it home, but if necessary, the Maltese dog transport vehicle will even take the dogs from door to door. Similar to other areas of the Emerging Settlements Programme, Responsible Animal Ownership is not just about one-time assistance. Once a dog has entered the system, the staff will visit the owner for several years to check on the animal's health and provide them with an information booklet on proper dog ownership. Thanks to their work, the number of stray dogs in the communities is decreasing, and the dogs are becoming healthier and gentler.



PRESENCE IN CATCHING-UP SETTLEMENTS (ESF+)
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