József Németh, Panna Tokodi

Law enforcement challenges and tasks during the COVID-19 pandemic

Abstract: The analysis of the impact of the pandemic caused by COVID-19 on tourism security, with particular reference to the international and Hungarian law enforcement aspects, was based on the content analysis of the literature, technical materials, international reports and the legislation. European countries have introduced the same or similar epidemiological measures, such as the closure of educational institutions, border closures, restrictions on international air traffic, curfews, restrictions on public events, and public transport. Law enforcement agencies are primarily responsible for enforcing these measures. As a typical "symptom" of the epidemiological measures, local demonstrations (protests) were organised, although the authorities were constantly monitoring the local security and curfew restrictions. The paper entitled Law enforcement challenges and tasks during the COVID-19 pandemic addresses these issues at the international and Hungarian levels, mainly by presenting the emergency-related measures of the Hungarian police force.

Keywords: COVID-19, tourism security, law enforcement aspects, police, hospital command system

Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic[1], in addition to their core responsibilities, law enforcement agencies worldwide have been responsible for enforcing government and public health measures to contain the spread of the disease. However, maintaining public order and public safety also remains a priority in times of emergency, with law enforcement personnel being at increased risk of infection due to their close contact with the public.[2] The past year and a half has shown that the pandemic has had an impact on the functioning of law enforcement agencies, the organisation of shifts, as well as on the economic, social and health situation.[3]

Analysis shows that countries have opted to introduce broadly similar measures, such as social distancing, quarantine rules, travel restrictions, tracing for contacts of persons suspected of being infected, curfew restrictions or a shift to digital education. From spring 2020, the implementation of these measures and their monitoring were among the responsibilities of law enforcement agencies. During epidemics in the past, law enforcement agencies were responsible for cooperating with the government and public health officials to prevent the spread of the disease, serve the upkeep of the local community and maintain public order in the same way.

The current situation is complicated by the fact that citizens do not know how long the exceptional circumstances will persist, whether further restrictions or measures will come into force, or whether the improving epidemiological data have brought the expected breakthrough, the complete lifting of restrictive measures. In several countries, social resistance to the pandemic and opposition to the protection rules, which was also reflected in local demonstrations (protests), were also reported in the media. In addition, citizens expressed their opinions by breaking curfew restrictions, quarantine rules, and ignoring other measures.

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[1] The coronavirus defined as the COVID-19 virus strain that is defined by the International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses (ICTV) as Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). The WHO declared it a pandemic on 11 March 2020, when cases were reported in more than 100 countries.

[2] Jennings, Wesley G. – Perez, Nicholas M. (2020): The Immediate Impact of COVID-19 on Law Enforcement in the United States, American Journal of Criminal Justice, Vol. 45, No. 4, 690. o. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12103-020-09536-2 Accessed: 11.03.2021

[3] Brito, C. S. – Luna, A. M. – Sanberg, E. L. (2009): Benchmarks for developing a law enforcement pandemic flu plan. US Department of Justice: Bureau of Justice Assistance. https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/lbrr/archives/cnmcs-plcng/cn34974-eng.pdf. Accessed: 12.03.2021

A focused thematic analysis of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic cannot be complete at this stage, as the processes are still ongoing, and at the time of writing this manuscript, people are striving to defeat the 3rd wave of the virus at the global level.

1. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on (tourism) safety and security

The overall public health situation in a particular tourist destination is a key factor when making a travel decision. A high level of health safety also depends on the performance of the country concerned. It can only be maintained at the maximum level by having strict controls in compliance with the legislation. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of these regulations, as a worldwide pandemic can considerably reduce or limit travelling. The end of the third wave of the Coronavirus pandemic does not mean that we can be completely free of the virus. It is still important to follow the warnings and recommendations of the epidemiological organisations at the global level, which can reduce the risks of a new wave. That is also important because security is a basic human need, including public safety and health security.[4]

In an era of total tourism[5], the possibility of an epidemic that is restricted only to one country at first to become a pandemic later has increased significantly, as the global emergence of the coronavirus pandemic has shown. Epidemics prevention and control cover all aspects of life, and the threat of a virus affects our subjective sense of security and thus has an impact as a security threat factor. In a broader understanding of security, epidemics can be included among the security risks and threats, although researchers and experts are currently divided on this issue. However, it is clear that the virus has an impact not only at individual and community levels but also at the national and international level, as the social, health, economic and political consequences are unavoidable, albeit indirectly. The measures introduced by national governments have already had a marked impact on the relationship between countries. When the virus was at its peak, countries closed their borders, restricting access except for the free movement of goods. Since the mass introduction of vaccines and the rise in vaccination rates, the countries have facilitated travel by signing bilateral agreements, thus helping revive tourism.

While the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic are not yet clear, it is obvious, that its impact on future security will bring complex, wide-ranging changes. The impact of the outbreak of the pandemic has been felt by all economic operators concerned, and especially by those involved in tourism.[6] And the direct effects can only be fully assessed once the pandemic is over. However, it is already clear that the effects of the epidemic are diverse, affecting almost all sectors of society and the economy.[7]

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[4] Mátyás, Szabolcs – Németh, József – Ritecz, György (2020): A turizmusbiztonság társadalmi és gazdasági összefüggéseinek statisztikai vizsgálata.[Statistical analysis of the social and economic context of tourism safety] In: TERÜLETI STATISZTIKA 60: 5 pp. 567-580, 13

[5] The definition of the concept: "1. The entire surface of the Earth (510 million km^2) can be understood as a tourist destination; 2. Most of the population is involved in the flows as travellers or as inhabitants of the host areas; 3. States, local governments, associations, but also individuals, are seeking to devote as much of their resources as possible to be utilised in tourism." Michalkó Gábor: Turizmus a hadviselés árnyékában. In: Michalkó, G. – Németh, J. – Ritecz, Gy. (2020): Turizmusbiztonság [Tourism safety and security]. Dialog Campus Budapest, 75

[6] Kovács, László – Keller, Krisztina – Tóth-Kaszás, Nikoletta – Szőke, Viktória (2021): A Covid19-járvány hatása egyes turisztikai szolgáltatók működésére: azonnali válaszok és megoldások. [The impact of Covid-19 on the activities of some tourism operators: Immediate responses and solutions.] *Turisztikai és Vidékfejlesztési Tanulmányok.* 6:2. 6-24; Németh, J. – Ritecz, Gy. (2020): Turizmusbiztonság. Dialog Campus Budapest, 75
Németh, József: Turizmusbiztonság a határ menti övezetekben [Tourism in border zones]. In Michalkó G. – Németh, J. – Ritecz, Gy. (2020): Turizmusbiztonság [Tourism safety]. Dialog Campus Budapest, 385

[7] Kovács, L. (ed.) 2020: *Globális Kihívás – Lokális válaszok, A Koronavírus (Covid 19) gazdasági és társadalmi összefüggései és hatásai*.[Global Challenge - Local Responses, Economic and Social Context and Impact of the

Uncertainty was a general feature of the pandemic, which also made it difficult to take appropriate measures. This impact was felt both at the institutional and individual level, challenging at the government level in terms of what measures were needed and how long they were to be maintained.[8] Bearing in mind, of course, that the choice of organisations, institutions, methods, procedures, and measures involved in the response to the hazards must be adapted to the specific situation.[9]

With regard to tourism safety and security, existing security processes are being/will be modified. According to the information provided by the UN World Tourist Organization,[10] a growing number of destinations are carrying out differentiated risk-based analyses (health and hygiene indicators, environmental performance index) to mitigate the travel restrictions imposed.

Since the beginning of the pandemic many countries have taken action to combat the virus by restricting trips and air travel. Although air travel has largely resumed, concerns about safety and hygiene continue to deter passengers from travelling. Mandatory PCR tests, the introduction of rapid testing and COVID certificates, as well as increased hygiene rules will go a long way to boosting tourism both at home and abroad, but these measures will only have an economic impact in the long term. Once travel restrictions are lifted, priority should be given to safe travel, thus encouraging people to travel, because if borders are permeable and tourists can move freely, gaining experiences is not jeopardised.[11]

2. Challenges and tasks to be addressed by law enforcement

The COVID-19 pandemic is one of the biggest social and economic challenges of our time. Responses to the crisis have been similar in most areas and at the international level. Most countries have taken similar measures, such as closing schools and workplaces, switching to working from home, cancelling events, restricting gatherings, public transport, and travel, and imposing time limits on going out. The increased presence of law enforcement agencies in public places is intended to prevent mass gatherings, to avoid the rapid spread of the virus in the community.[12] It should be noted here that there was no precedent or previous practical experience of police involvement in addressing a public health crisis, but even so, it has been applied by many governments around the world.[13]

Coronavirus (Covid-19)] Savaria University Press, Szombathely, ISBN 978-615-5753-50-3; ISSN 2631-133X, 6; Pintér, G. – Zsiborács, H. – Hegedűsné Baranyai, N. – Vincze, A. – Birkner, Z. (2020): The Economic and Geographical Aspects of the Status of Small-Scale Photovoltaic Systems in Hungary - A Case Study, Energies, 13: 13; Németh, J., Tokodi, P. (2020): A turizmus és az egészségügyi biztonság összefüggései [Links between tourism and health safety] In: Marton, Zsuzsanna – Németh, Kornél – Pelesz, Pelbárt – Péter, Erzsébet (ed.) IV. Turizmus és Biztonság Nemzetközi Tudományos Konferencia, Nagykanizsa, Magyarország: Pannon Egyetem Nagykanizsai Kampusz, 341-349; Németh, J. (2020): Turizmusbiztonság Magyarországon [Tourism safety in Hungary]. In: Michalkó, G – Németh, J – Ritecz, Gy (2020): Turizmusbiztonság, Budapest, Magyarország: Dialóg Campus Kiadó, 443-460.

[8] Katona, Márton – Petrovics, Nándor: *Válság és együttműködés.* In Közgazdasági Szemle, Vol. LXVIII, January 2021 78

[9] Mátyás, Sza. – Németh, J. – Ritecz, Gy. (2020): A turizmusbiztonság társadalmi és gazdasági összefüggéseinek statisztikai vizsgálata. Ibid.

[10] UNWTO: *International Tourist Numbers Could Fall 60-80% in 2020.* UNWTO Reports. https://www.unwto.org/news/covid-19-international-tourist-numbers-could-fall-60-80-in-2020 Accessed: 11.08.2021

[11] Németh, J. (2020): Turizmusbiztonság Magyarországon, Ibid. 443-460

[12] Leung, G. M. et al. (2004) The Epidemiology of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome in the 2003 Hong Kong Epidemic: An Analysis of All 1755 Patients, Annals of Internal Medicine, p. 662. doi: 10.7326/0003-4819-141-9-200411020-00006.

[13] Farrow, K. (2020). Policing the Pandemic in the UK Using the Principles of Procedural Justice. Policing, Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice, 14(3), 587–592. https://doi.org/10.1093/police/paaa031 Accessed:

Above all, it is important that people obey the laws and the instructions of the government. Without them, it is impossible to defeat the virus.[14] Countries have used different combinations of control measures, and the level of compliance with government recommendations on social distancing may also vary from country to country, partly due to different levels of implementation. As one of the first interventions to combat the spread of COVID-19, many governments published advice on social distancing, including the recommendation that as many people as possible should work from home, thus reducing the use of public transport and all the other non-essential contacts.[15]

A study by Janani and Abilasha on the topic[16] provided statistical evidence that knowledge of the symptoms of the COVID-19 disease and taking precautions is important and highlighted that awareness is high among law enforcement agencies and the police. While each public health emergency is unique with its own challenges, the response of law enforcement agencies should always be coordinated with the authorities providing public health, medical, and other essential services.[17] In this way, these agencies can effectively support the fight against the virus and set a good example for the citizens.

2.1 Epidemiological measures in Hungary

On 31 January 2020, the Hungarian government was one of the first to set up an Operational Group, which took measures more stringent and comprehensive than international recommendations to prevent and combat the pandemic. The Operational Group reported to the public through daily press conferences and communiqués. As a result, the public received credible information on a daily basis on the latest developments regarding the coronavirus pandemic and its control. At the closure of this manuscript, daily press briefings are now in the past, as the Operational Group moved to a stand-by reporting mode in the first week of June 2021.

After the first wave of the coronavirus epidemic, Hungary reintroduced border controls on all internal land, air, and water borders for 30 days from 1 September 2020. That was necessary to avert the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic which was a threat to the safety of life and property, and protect the health and lives of Hungarian citizens. The measure has since been extended several times.

The police constantly monitored compliance with the epidemiological measures (curfew, compliance with the rules of official home quarantine; breaches of protective measures, such as those on wearing masks, the opening hours of shops, the management of events, and travel restrictions) and took action against those in breach.

14.08.2021

[14] Esper, F., Weibel, C., et al. (2005) Evidence of a novel human coronavirus that is associated with respiratory tract disease in infants and young children, The Journal of infectious diseases, 191(4), 492–498

[15] Flaxman, Seth et al. (2020) Report 13: Estimating the number of infections and the impact of non-pharmaceutical interventions on COVID-19 in 11 European countries DOI: https://doi.org/10.25561/77731 15

[16] Janani, K. – Dr. Abilasha, R. (2020): Survey on awareness about coronavirus symptoms and precautions among law enforcement and police department. https://www.archives.palarch.nl/index.php/jae/article/view/1343/1379 Accessed: 13.01.2021

[17] Richards, E. P. – Rathbun, K. C. – Brito, C. S. – Luna, A. (2006): The role of law enforcement in public health emergencies: A special considerations for an all-hazards approach. US Department of Justice: Bureau of Justice Assistance. https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/bja/214333.pdf. Accessed: 13.07.2021

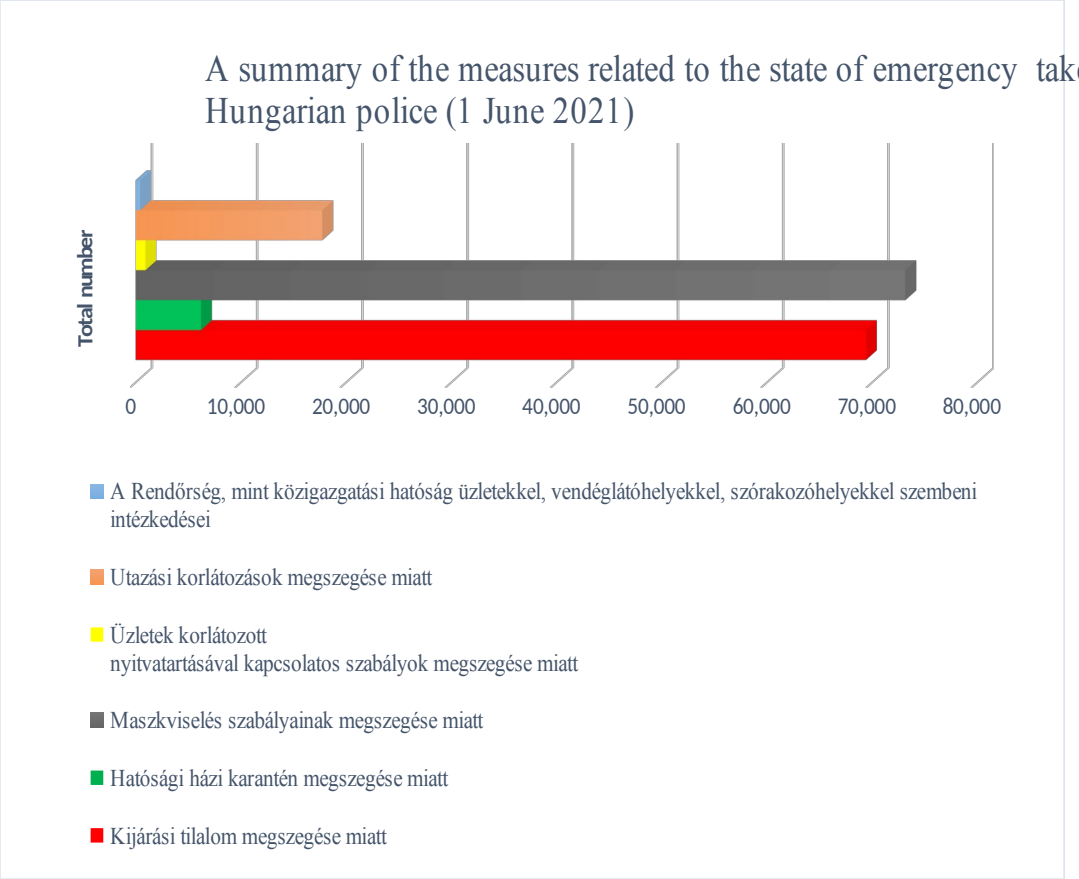


Figure 1: A summary of the measures related to the state of emergency taken by the Hungarian police (1 June 2021)
Source: https://koronavirus.gov.hu/, edited by the authors[18]

However, the fight against the new type of coronavirus pandemic and saving lives is not only the task of the Government, law enforcement agencies, and doctors and nurses. All of us have to take part in the fight, as we all have a shared responsibility for protecting our health and that of others.

2.1.1 The system of hospital commanders

The new system of hospital commanders, established at the end of March 2020, was a novelty at the international level, the legal basis of which was Government Decree 72/2020 (28.III.) on hospital commanders and protecting healthcare supply. No similar system and no national hospital commander had been appointed in Hungary before, but the formulation of the post of hospital commander can be traced back to the 1840s. On 25 April 1849, Deputy War Minister György Klapka issued a decree to strengthen the work of the medical officers' corps, according to which hospital commanders were obliged to make use of the work of volunteers. At the time, the wording *hospital commanders* were understood as the leaders of the army medical corps, who, naturally, did not carry out the same activities that the hospital commanders (appointed under the government decree that came into force on 29 March 2020) had to. The National Hospital Chief Commander, who carries out his duties under the direct authority of the Minister responsible for law enforcement, directs the hospital commanders

[18] Legend, from top to bottom: Measures taken against shops, catering and entertaining establishments by the police as a public administration authority; Because of breach of travel restrictions; Because of breach of regulations related to the limited opening hours of shops; Because of breach of regulations on wearing masks; Because of breach of official home quarantine; Because of breach of curfew.

assigned to the designated health institutions. The aim is to provide effective support to the healthcare system during the COVID-19 pandemic, i.e. to help healthcare institutions have the necessary capacity and ensure the security of assets. It also helps to develop cooperation between hospital managers and hospital commanders. Hospital commanders include senior officers from the police, disaster management, and the armed forces.[19]

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2.1.2 Minor offence? Crime?

The pandemic has brought into focus a number of illegal acts, less dangerous to society and regulated by the law on minor offences. With the declaration of the state of emergency, the Government amended Act II of 2012 on Minor Offences, Offence Procedures and the Registration System of Offence in several cases, even though the offence of breaching the rules on epidemics is laid down in the Hungarian Criminal Code and can be committed during an epidemic, which is still the case in Hungary. The offences laid down by decree are intended to promote the observance of the necessary rules of conduct in the light of the virus situation, the content of which may vary from day to day depending on the current situation. The date of expiry coincides with the date of termination of the special legal order.[20]

New concepts have been introduced to the public, such as quarantine, epidemiological surveillance, contact tracing, and epidemiological checks. Epidemiological surveillance and quarantine have become applicable to a person who has been in contact with a person suffering from COVID-19 and for whom there is a high probability of having a detectable disease after the incubation period. In its strict form, this person is "sentenced" to official home quarantine, with restrictions on freedom of movement, right of contact, and exercising their profession, and may be liable to criminal prosecution if they breach it.

There has been (and still is) a lot of true news and almost as much fake news about the coronavirus, upsetting people's peace of mind. Many people are unaware of the fact that spreading rumours (scaremongering)[21] is a criminal act and is indirectly an obstacle to protecting ourselves against the virus. The confusion caused by the global pandemic has led to a massive increase in fake news about COVID-19, which the police are actively fighting. In relation to these misconceptions, the motives for creating and spreading the fake news themselves include hybrid attacks, economic reasons or the satisfaction of individual interests.

Amendments to the above-mentioned Minor Offences Act adopted in March 2020 (and recently repealed) created a sui generis liability to a penalty for being in a catering establishment, an event, the theatre or other listed premises at an unauthorised time or in an unauthorised manner. It was also an offence to break the curfew in force at the time.[22]
Overall, the most common pandemic-related offences were:

[19] Barabás T., János: Biztonságpiac Évkönyv 2020 [Security Market Yearbook 2020]. 2020/1 ISSN 2061-6082 17

[20] Skorka, Tamás: Koronavírus a szabálysértés szemszögéből [Coronavirus from a minor offence perspective]. In: Magyar Rendészet 2021/1. 99-115 DOI: 10.32577/mr.2021.1.7 100

[21] Section 337 of the Criminal Code: Any conduct of uttering or publishing before the public at large a statement one knows to be false or with a reckless disregard for its truth or falsity at the scene of some emergency by which to violate public order or disturb the public peace at a place of public danger is guilt of a felony punishable by imprisonment not exceeding three years.

- scaremongering,
- threat of public endangerment,
- fraud,
- violation of epidemic control regulations,

while the most frequent administrative (minor) offences were:

- breach of curfew rules
- breach of official home quarantine
- breach of regulations related to the limited opening hours of shops.[23]

2.1.3 Trends in the number of certain recorded offences

After more than a year, the criminogenic impact of the coronavirus pandemic emerging in Hungary in March 2020 is partially detectable statistically, too. The response to the challenges posed by the coronavirus was varied, depending on the severity of the pandemic. Both the legislator and the law enforcement agencies aim to protect the safety of life and property and ensure the conditions for combating the pandemic. Thus, the number of certain types of crime increased significantly while, logically, other types of crime decreased. After all, crime does not stop in a crisis situation but more likely shifts to other areas.

There has also been a marked increase in cybercrime, trafficking in counterfeit medicines and health products, economic crime, document fraud, and other abuses at the European level. These are usually committed individually or by criminal organisations.

In the area of cybercrime, the pandemic is linked to phishing, ransomware, and messages sent by various malicious software, which, with a strong online presence, pose a challenge to law enforcement agencies. The European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (commonly known as Europol) has been monitoring the impact of the virus situation on crime since March 2020.[24] The various fraud networks that target individuals, businesses, and community organisations, as well, have also adapted to the conditions created by the virus.

The majority of the fraud cases revolved around the pandemic and the measures taken to prevent the spread of the virus. For example, fraudsters phoned on behalf of a healthcare institution demanding to settle bills immediately for a relative supposedly undergoing urgent medical treatment, or persuaded gullible victims that their savings were not safe because of the pandemic situation, and they offered help. In some cases, fraudsters posing as public officials "took measures" against violators of the disease control measures, imposing on-the-spot fines.[25] This type of fraud also occurred in several cases in Hungary.

According to the data of the Hungarian Criminal Statistics System[26], the number of thefts in Hungary decreased nationally (-14.2%) in April 2021, but examining the data of the

[22] Ambrus, István: A koronavírus-járvány és a büntetőjog. In: [The COVID-19 pandemic and criminal law] MTA Law Working Papers 2020/5. Budapest ISSN 2064-4515 http://jog.tk.mta.hu/mtalwp

[23] Dr. Draskovich Edina: A koronavírus járvánnyal kapcsolatos jogsértések [Violations related to the coronavirus pandemic]. In: Infojegyzet, Országgyűlés Hivatal, Közgyűjteményi és Közművelődési Igazgatóság, Képviselői Információs Szolgálat, 2020/36. https://www.parlament.hu/documents/10181/4464848/Infojegyzet_2020_36_COVID_19_jogsertesek.pdf/2eaa554e-ed9e-1bfd-3b4d-7c8ec8737205?t=1589189206805 Accessed: 05.04.2021.

[24] EUROPOL: How COVID-19-related crime infected Europe during 2020, 2020. 11. 12. Source: europol.europa.eu (Accessed: 04.06. 2021)

[25] Felméry, Zoltán: Hogyan hatott a COVID-19 járvány a bűncselekmények alakulására? A 2020. november 11-i Europol jelentés ismertetése. [How has the COVID-19 epidemic affected crime trends? Presentation of the Europol report of 11 November 2020]. Stratégiai Védelmi Kutatóintézet Elemzések 2021/9 April 16 2021 NKE Stratégiai Védelmi Kutatóintézet Elemzések (ISSN 2063-4862)

[26] https://www.ksh.hu/heti-monitor/buncselekmeny.html Accessed: 04.06.2021

individual counties, it can be stated that, compared to April of the previous year, there was an increase in Bács-Kiskun, Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, Csongrád-Csanád, Győr-Moson-Sopron, Komárom-Esztergom and Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok counties. According to the aggregated data, in April 2020, during the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic, the number of thefts registered was 3,788, while in April 2021, during the third wave of the pandemic, 3,251 thefts were reported. Although there is a decrease nationwide, there is also an increase at the local level in several counties, as shown by the data broken down by county. In many cases, this can be explained by the fact that many people have lost their jobs, their standard of living has fallen dramatically and they have resorted even to committing crimes to secure their livelihood. If we look only at the tourism sector – which was completely wiped out – thousands of people have lost their jobs and have been forced into new jobs, if they had the opportunity to do so at all.

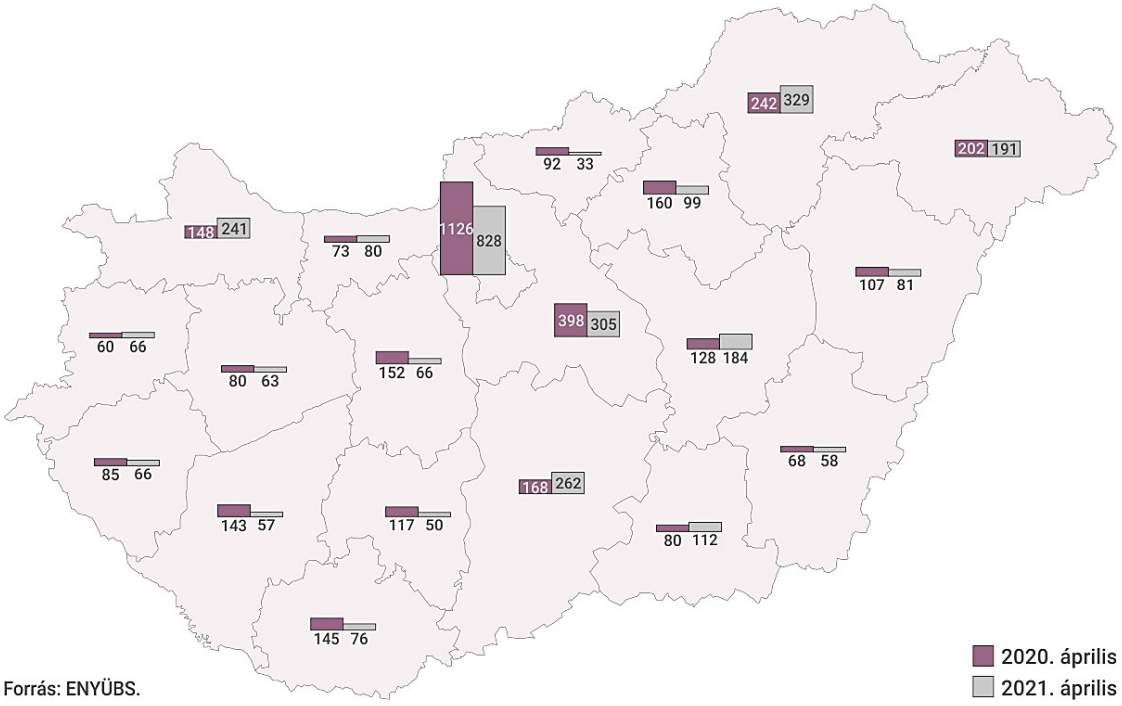


Figure 2: Changes in the number of thefts in Hungary by county
(Accessed: 04.06. 2021)

In Hungary, the number of thefts and vandalism cases decreased, while the number of document forgeries, fraud, and misuse of personal data cases increased compared to April of the previous year. This trend is also observed at the European level. Although the increase is not as huge for fraud (April 2020: 974 cases, April 2021: 1,093 cases, an increase of 12.2%), the increase for misuse of personal data is 316.6% (April 2020: 30 cases, April 2021: 125 cases). All the same, the figures for the forgery of public documents are also outstanding, from 326 cases in 2020 to 523 in April 2021, an increase of 60%. Perhaps unsurprisingly, these last two categories of offences are both closely linked to epidemiological measures. In addition, the forgery of public documents (certificates of immunity)[27] has also emerged as a new offence.

[27] Based on Section 23/A of Government Decree 84/2020, as of 01.05.2021

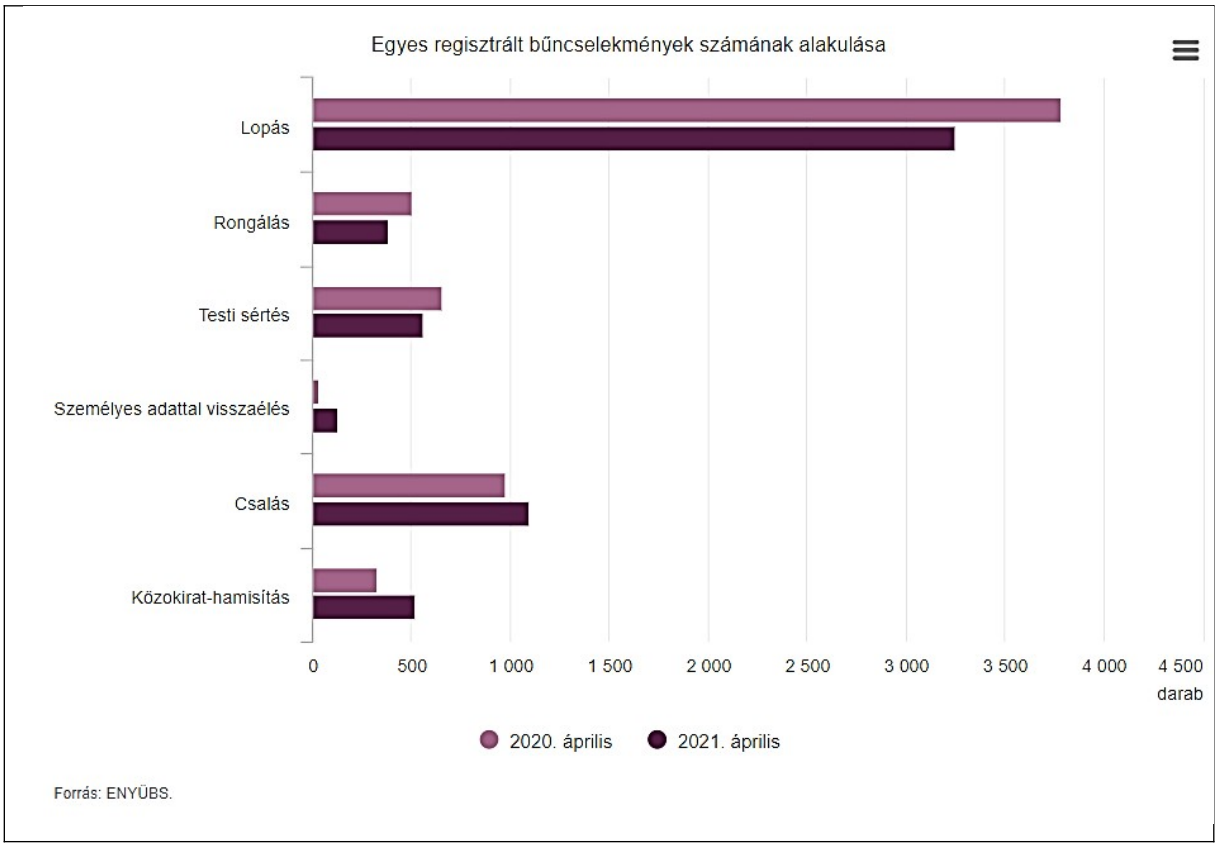


Figure 3: Changes in the number of certain registered offences in Hungary (Accessed: 04.06.2021)[28]

2.2 Guaranteeing municipal security and curfew control in Hungary

The measure that had the highest impact on the lives of the population was the introduction of restrictions of movement.[29] founded reasons which were listed in the effective government decree. This strict measure was most stringent during the first wave of the epidemic, but the legislator was much more lenient during the – later developed – second and third waves.

The "Keep your distance, stay at home" rule was the most difficult one to enforce, and the introduction of the mandatory social distancing rule, or, more precisely, its violation, led to the highest number of offences. With the arrival of the good weather, more and more people felt that confinement was no longer bearable and broke the effective government regulations. In the event of a breach of the distancing rules, the police had the following measures at their disposal: warning, on-the-spot fine, and the report of an offence. In police terminology, in such cases, the offence called "breach of the rules of conduct relating to restrictions of movement" was committed.

The introduction of the above measure and the associated demonstrative presence of police (and military police) in public places may have helped to ensure the safety of the settlements, and to protect them from the virus.

Prior to the above measure and after 12 March 2020 when Government Decree 40/2020 (III.11) declaring a state of emergency came into effect with regard to Government Decree No. 41/2020 (11.III.) on measures to be taken in the event of an emergency situation

[28] Legend from top to bottom: theft, vandalism, bodily harm, misuse of personal data, fraud, forgery of documents

[29] Government Decree No 71/2020 (27.III.) – breach of the rules of conduct relating to restrictions of movement

to prevent a human pandemic that threatens the safety of life and property, to avert the consequences of such an emergency situation, and to protect the health and the life of Hungarian citizens, based on the decision of the Government, border controls were temporarily reintroduced at the borders between Hungary and the Republic of Slovenia and between Hungary and the Republic of Austria while establishing a transit route. (The rapid decline in tourism also goes back to this date.) The entry into the country was allowed only at designated border crossing points (and at Liszt Ferenc International Airport) after border checks. In view of this government decree, entry into the country was prohibited for foreigners[30] unless the Deputy Chief Commissioner of the Police issued a decision granting an exemption in particularly meritorious cases, subject to the establishment of a specific rule of conduct. A non-exhaustive list of the exceptions included, for example, the transit of military convoys, the transit for humanitarian purposes on a designated route, commuting for work purposes, or entry in the interest of the national economy. Of course, breaking the specific rules of conduct laid down in the decision on individual applications when entering, staying or transiting for such purposes was also considered an offence. With regard to health protection, in the case of such an offence, the police officer taking measures was not allowed to use a verbal warning instead of imposing a fine, which shows the high priority given to the protection against the virus and the prevention of its spread.

2.3. Local demonstrations (protests)

Social resistance to protective measures in the context of a global pandemic has been studied by Stephen Reicher and Clifford Stott.[31] In their analysis of the causes of social resistance to pandemic regulations, they focused on the examination of illegitimate, disproportionate, excessive measures and the sense of grievance, while emphasising the need for credible, objective communication to society, which, when implemented, led to norm-following behaviour in society.

Although negative decisions and measures may be taken during the control of the pandemic, they do not necessarily have to be accompanied by social conflicts and negative social effects. Despite this, local demonstrations have taken place across Europe, with thousands of people protesting against the restrictions in the Netherlands, Athens, Istanbul, Paris, Brussels and Berlin. [32]

[30] The Basic Law of Hungary stipulates that a Hungarian national can return (from abroad) any time. (Paragraph 2, Section XIV, Basic Law)

[31] Reicher, S. – Scott, C. (2020): Policing the Coronavirus Outbreak: Processes and Prospects for Collective Disorder. Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice, 14(3), 569–573 https://doi.org/10.1093/police/paaa014

[32] További képek [Further images]: https://kepek.444.hu/2021/05/02/europa-szerte-osszecsapasokkal-vegzodtek-a-majus-1-jei-tuntetesek



Image 1, Source: https://kepek.444.hu/2021/05/02/europa-szerte-osszecsapasokkal-vegzodtek-a-majus-1-jei-tuntetesek Photo taken by Kenzo Tribouillard/AFP

In Hungary, after the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic on 11 March 2020, the government declared a state of emergency, people's normal lives were changed by curfew restrictions, and certain parts of the economy and many institutions were shut down. Considering the socio-economic consequences of the pandemic crisis throughout Hungary, it can be established that while the negative effects can be felt by anyone, certain sectors (e.g. tourism, catering, and culture) and the workers in these areas were particularly affected.

It is also apparent that the number of those affected by the economic crisis is far higher than the number of people infected by the disease. Therefore, understandably, there has been a public debate in Hungary whether more damage is being caused by the pandemic itself or by the restrictions to prevent the spread of the virus.

The feeling of insecurity is a burden for everyone. We all cope with this stress in different ways, and the police staff is no exception. The police must respond to a public health crisis and promote compliance with legislation that is constantly changing. Among other things, the police have a duty to prevent civil unrest and to increase communication with citizens. Police communication must be clear and compassionate, and avoid unnecessary personal contact.

Some of the staff taking police measures have been particularly exposed to the adverse psychological effects of the situation resulting from the pandemic. Police officers also have to manage their family life, organise daily tasks, and caring for their children. Besides, they have to carry out their daily duties as police officers. The above cases have also highlighted the increased pressure on police officers in the context of the pandemic situation, which in some cases leads to police excesses, disproportionate and unlawful measures.

It is therefore of the utmost importance that commanders draw the attention of police officers to the need to implement measures in a lawful, professional, justified, proportionate, and also in a cultured, and objective manner. One of the basic requirements for the adoption

of coercive measures is that they should be gradual and implemented only for the necessary period in all cases. Colleagues are expected to comply with the legislation in force, with internal standards, and respect and enforce law and order.

In addition to the above, special attention should be paid to the physical, medical and psychological well-being of police staff, including, where necessary, the assistance of conflict resolution and problem-solving specialists. The pandemic affects everyone, and the police are no exception.

Local demonstrations and protests have shown how extremist sentiments can surface and culminate in violent demonstrations as a result of restrictions on individual freedom, personal freedom of movement, the closure of shops and restaurants, the cancellation of sporting and cultural events, and other restrictive measures or quarantine. The aim is to ensure security, but the current means of achieving this is/may be restricting our freedom.

Summary, conclusions and proposals

During the pandemic caused by COVID-19, European countries introduced the same epidemiological measures, such as the closure of educational institutions, border closures, restriction on international air traffic, restrictions on movements, curfews, and the restriction on public events and public transport. Law enforcement agencies were held primarily responsible for enforcing these measures. Local demonstrations (protests) were a typical "symptom" of the epidemiological measures, although the authorities were constantly monitoring curfews and the security of the settlements.

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, several international and Hungarian studies, articles, and analyses have been written, initially with a medical focus. Now the measures taken to slow down and control the epidemic, the economic, social, and political changes, and the tasks of law enforcement agencies are also in the spotlight. The police also played a key role in the fight against the pandemic by temporarily reintroducing border controls, monitoring compliance with protection measures, sanctioning illegal behaviour, and operating the hospital commanders' system, thus contributing to Hungary's effective control of COVID-19.

The research also showed that law enforcement agencies are under increased pressure in their work. For that reason, it is of paramount importance to pay attention to the mental and psychological state of police officers, and that should also be addressed by the work of commanders. An international collection of case studies may help the leaders' work a lot and can highlight possible internal problems of the staff which may be exacerbated by the increased pace of work due to the emergency situation.

Measures taken by individual nations have indirectly transformed relations between countries. While some countries did not seal themselves off hermetically, others allowed only their own citizens to enter their countries (with a few exceptions). These measures resulted in reduced trust between countries which can be either a shrinking country's image or a lack of assistance in the future, having a long-term impact. In order to prevent this, appropriate government measures need to be taken, and high-quality communication is necessary also at the international level. Incidentally, communication is the key to any action taken. When the public are aware of what needs to be introduced, restricted, or banned and why, there will be fewer people to oppose or take action against these measures. Information is power and a tool to be used. Credible and comprehensible information will always be of paramount importance from the perspective of security and the sense of security.[33]

[33] Németh, Kornél: Klímaváltozással összefüggő biztonsági problémák a turizmusban. Ibid. 98

In conclusion, COVID-19 has forced society to take advantage of the digital world and use it in their work. Although the situation created by the virus meant that practical application was ahead of theory, it also opened up an opportunity to learn new solutions and gain new experience. However, it is important not to manage our existing processes "remotely" but to review existing processes and, where possible, digitise, automate and rethink them. That can be done and developed in some law enforcement sectors, too. It is not possible to replace the service in public areas in this way or the investigation at the scene of an accident, for example, but certain work processes, such as the installation of CCTV camera systems or the use of drones in crime scene investigation could be a great help in the work of police officers. The coronavirus situation, which required an increased police presence, in addition to exercising duties in other areas, highlighted that some tasks can be done using remote work or automation, thus relieving colleagues from certain duties. In our view, further impact studies in this area are needed to help streamline both departmental and managerial workflows. The best example of a pioneering digitalisation in the law enforcement field is the introduction of electronic home quarantine checks by the authorities, which has made the work more efficient, as it has proved sufficient to contact the quarantine holder online, saving many hours of work and facilitating the work of the officers assigned to this task.

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