RESEARCH ON POVERTY

ANALYSIS OF HUNGARIANS' FINANCIAL VULNERABILITY

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Equilibrium Institute

Friedrich Ebert Stiftung

Optimism Has Grown, Yet Fewer People Achieve What They Consider an Average Standard of Living, According to the Equilibrium Institute's Research on Poverty

According to the Equilibrium Institute's research on poverty, the financial situation of Hungarians has improved somewhat compared to previous years. Around 70 percent of respondents can heat their homes without difficulty and can regularly afford to consume meat or fish. This represents an improvement of nearly ten percentage points compared to the end of 2023, when inflation had already fallen to a persistently single-digit level and the easing of the energy crisis reduced the financial pressure on households. At the same time, financial security has also improved: compared to 2024, the share of people expecting their household income to increase has more than doubled (from 6 percent to 14 percent).

Meanwhile, the everyday cost of living has also risen noticeably. According to respondents in the research on poverty, the minimum income needed to make ends meet increased from HUF 250,000 (€650) to HUF 300,000 (€780) compared to 2024. The amount needed for an average standard of living rose from HUF 400,000 (€1,040) to HUF 500,000 (€1,300), while the income level associated with a carefree life increased from HUF 600,000 (€1,560) to HUF 700,000 (€1,820).

However, fewer and fewer people are able to achieve what they consider an average or above-average standard of living. In addition, nearly half of Hungarians (47 percent) cannot cover all basic expenses with confidence – whether heating, regular meat consumption, or a larger unexpected cost. Roughly 800,000 people live in severe material deprivation, meaning their possibilities are limited across all three fundamental dimensions of subsistence.

One in Four May Struggle to Heat Their Homes Next Quarter

As winter approaches, the question of whether households have sufficient financial resources to maintain adequate indoor heating becomes especially relevant. According to the Equilibrium Institute's 2025 research on poverty, 69 percent of Hungarian adults are confident they will have enough money to heat their homes, while 25 percent expect occasional difficulties. An additional 2 percent reported that they will not have enough money to keep their homes warm at all.

Based on the data, the situation has improved significantly in recent years. The change is particularly striking compared to the period of the 2022 energy crisis: at that time, 39 percent of respondents considered heating their homes an occasional challenge, while 12 percent saw it as an insurmountable one.

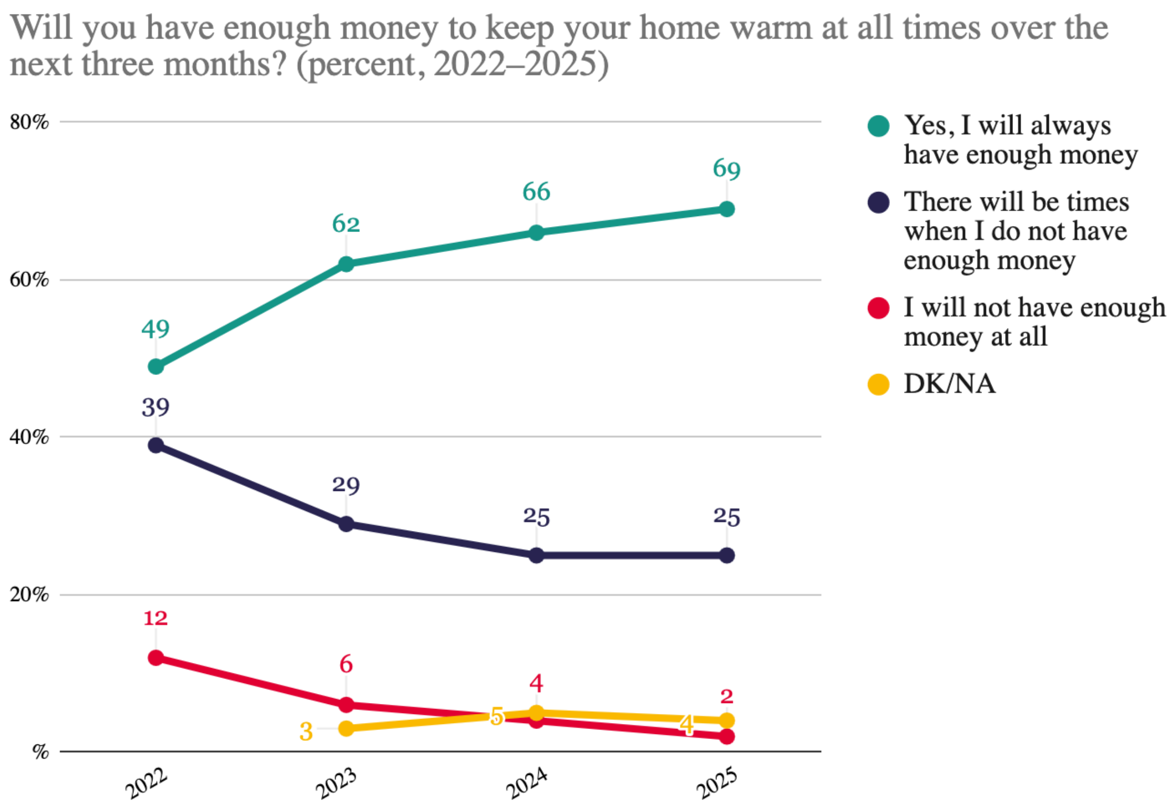

Figure 1. *In your opinion, over the next three months will you have enough money – or not enough money – to keep your home consistently warm, that is, at a temperature suitable for daily activities and sleeping?* | Source: ZRI Závecz Research, N = 1000, percent

Nearly One in Four Hungarians May Struggle to Afford Meat or Fish

According to data from the Equilibrium Institute, 72 percent of Hungarians will have enough money in the next quarter to eat meat or fish at least every other day, while for 23 percent this will not always be possible. Compared to 2022, this area has also seen a substantial improvement. While the surge in inflation in 2022–2023 understandably constrained people's ability to purchase food, the easing of inflation in 2024 and the increase in real wages have once again made a more varied diet attainable for many.

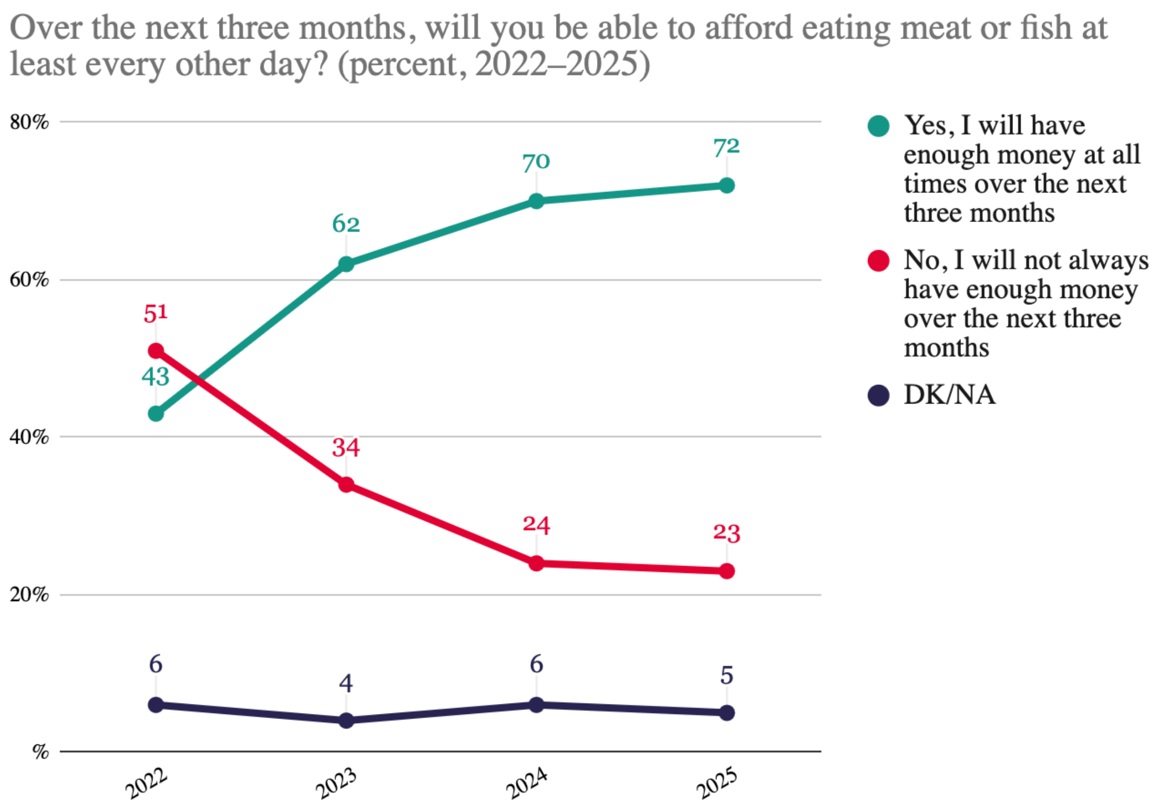

Figure 2. *In your opinion, over the next three months, will you be able – or not be able – to afford eating meat or fish at least every other day?* | Source: ZRI Závecz Research, N = 1000, percent

More Than One in Four Hungarians Could Not Immediately Cover an Unexpected Expense of HUF 100,000 (€260)

According to a public opinion survey conducted by the Equilibrium Institute in October 2025, 35 percent of the Hungarian population would struggle to cover an unexpected expense of HUF 100,000 (€260) but would still be able to manage it on their own. Twenty-nine percent reported that they would not be able to cope with a financial challenge of this size, while 33 percent said they would be able to pay the amount in question without difficulty.

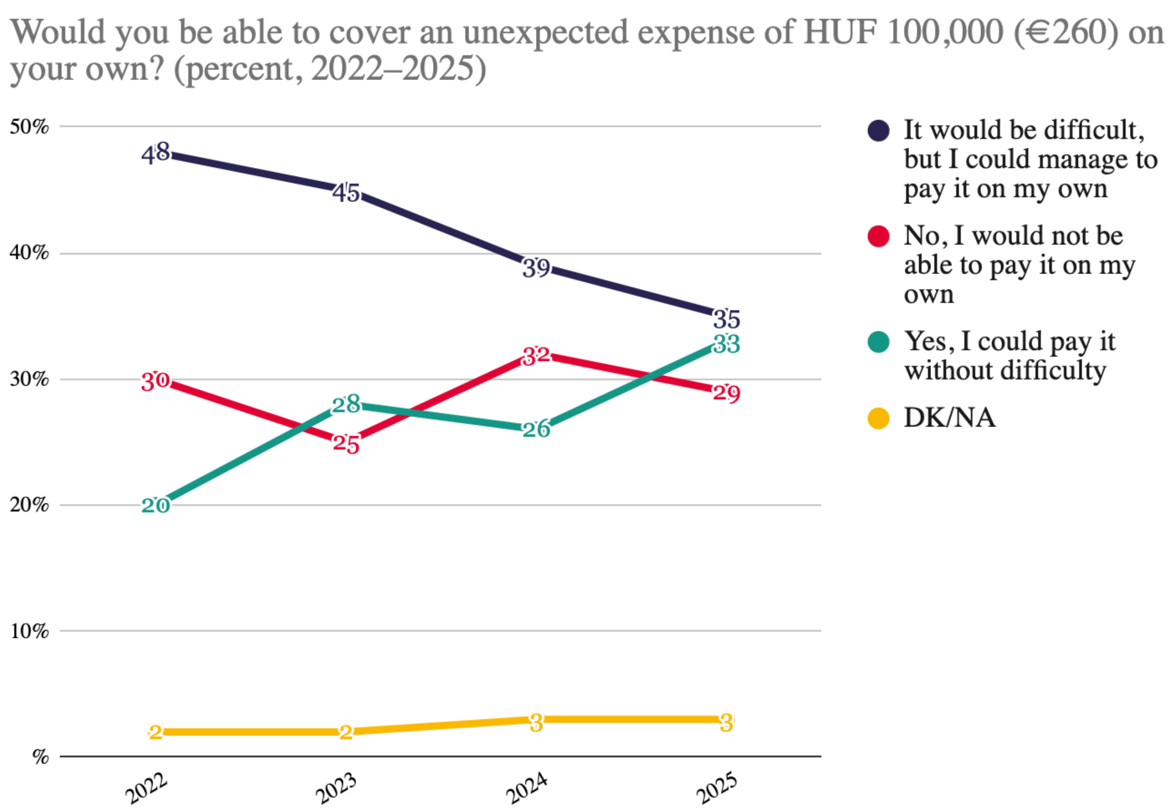

Figure 3. *If tomorrow you faced an unexpected but unavoidable expense of HUF 100,000 (€260), would you be able to pay the HUF 100,000 (€260) on your own, or would you not be able to pay it?* | Source: ZRI Závecz Research, N = 1000, percent

Compared to the 2024 data collection, the share of people who could settle a HUF 100,000 (€260) expense without difficulty increased by 7 percentage points (from 26 percent to 33 percent), while the proportion of those who could only cover this amount with difficulty decreased (from 39 percent to 35 percent), as did the share of those who would not be able to raise the money at all (from 32 percent to 29 percent).

However, the picture is somewhat nuanced by the fact that due to high inflation, the real value of HUF 100,000 (€260) has fallen significantly since 2022. Thus, the recent results reflect not only an improvement in income levels but also the weakening purchasing power of money. This is illustrated well by a relevant, everyday example: according to data from the Hungarian Central Statistical Office, the average price of an automatic washing machine was HUF 120,000 (€310) in early 2022, whereas by 2025 it had risen to HUF 160,000 (€415). In other words, if a household washing machine breaks down today, it is far more difficult to find a replacement for around HUF 100,000 (€260).

More Than Twice as Many People Expect Their Incomes to Increase Compared to 2024

According to the Equilibrium Institute's October 2025 data collection, more people are optimistic about their financial prospects for the next three months than last year. Two-thirds of respondents (66 percent) expect their household income to remain unchanged, while 14 percent anticipate an increase and another 14 percent consider a decrease in income likely.

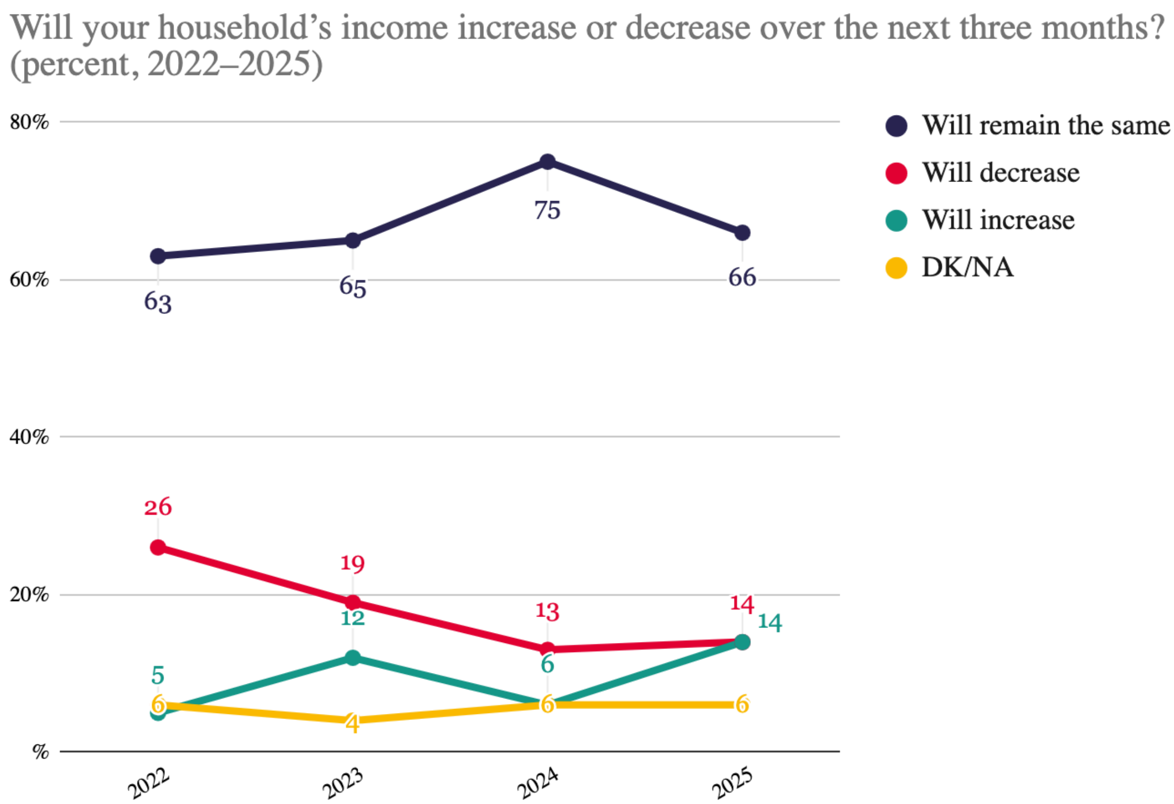

Figure 4. *In your opinion, over the next three months, will your household's monthly income increase or decrease? Please consider not only your own income, but also the income of all family members you live with.* | ZRI Závecz Research, N = 1000, percent

Compared to 2024, the share of people expecting their income to increase has grown substantially (from 6 percent to 14 percent), while the proportion of those anticipating a decrease has remained virtually unchanged (13–14 percent). Over the longer term, the trend reflects a favorable development: during the 2022 inflation wave, more than a quarter of the population (26 percent) expected their income to decline.

This renewed optimism aligns with recent economic developments: inflation fell to a persistently single-digit level in early 2024, employment remains high, and real wages began to rise again last year.

People Now Need HUF 50,000 (€130) More to Make Ends Meet Than Last Year

In its research on poverty, the Equilibrium Institute also asked Hungarians how much income they personally consider necessary for a constrained standard of living, for an average standard of living, and for a carefree life. According to the 2025 data collection, the average Hungarian respondent considers HUF 300,000 (€780) to be the minimum income needed to make ends meet, HUF 500,000 (€1,300) necessary for an average standard of living, and HUF 700,000 (€1,820) to maintain a carefree lifestyle.

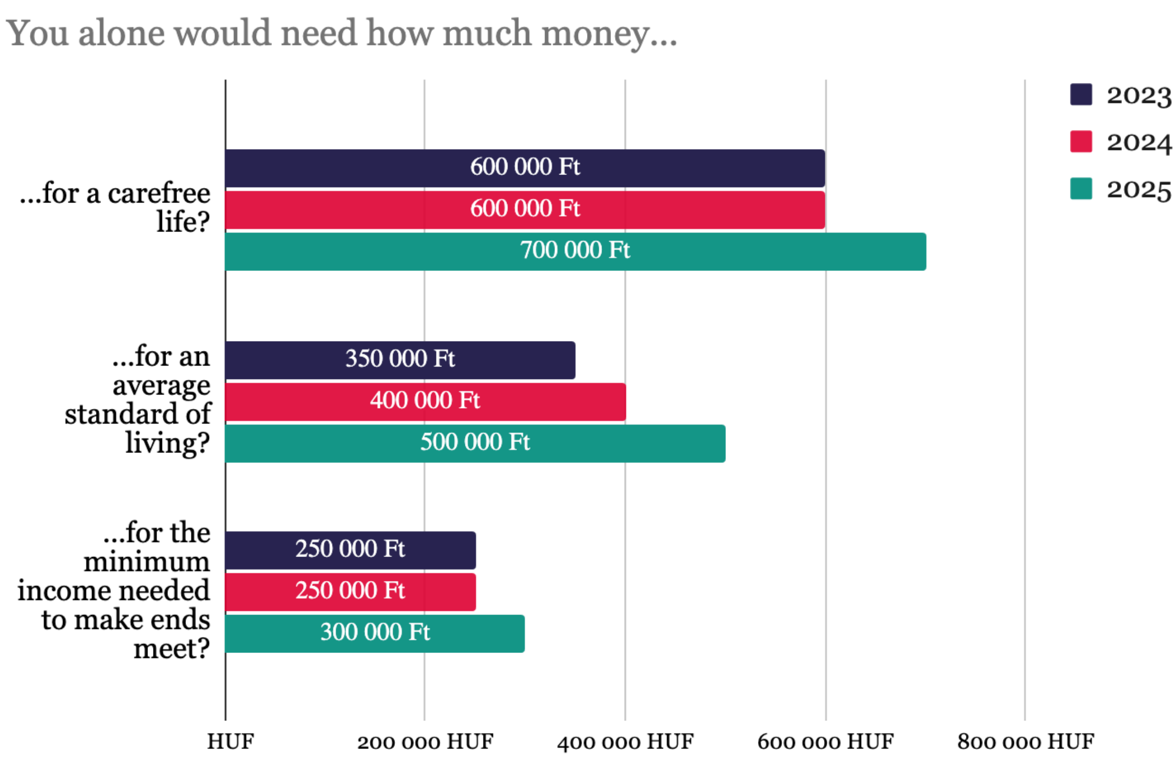

Figure 5. *How much income would you personally need for the minimum needed to make ends meet, for an average standard of living, and for a carefree life?* |Source: ZRI Závecz Research, N = 1000, median values

For the first time since 2023, the amount of income people consider necessary to make ends meet has increased: respondents now say they need at least HUF 300,000 (€780), which is HUF 50,000 (€130) more than a year earlier. The income considered necessary to maintain an average standard of living has risen by HUF 150,000 (€390) compared to 2023 and by HUF 100,000 (€260) compared to 2024. In parallel, the income seen as required for a carefree life also increased by HUF 100,000 (€260) over the past year.

44 Percent of Hungarians Live Below the Minimum Income Needed to Make Ends Meet

According to the Equilibrium Institute's survey, nearly half of Hungarians (45 percent) live on less than HUF 300,000 (€780) a month. This means that without support from a spouse or relatives, every second respondent is unable to generate the minimum income needed to make ends meet. A further 44 percent fall between the constrained and average standard-of-living thresholds – that is, they report a monthly income between HUF 300,000 (€780) and HUF 500,000 (€1,300). Only 11 percent of respondents live above the income level associated with an average standard of living.

Over the past three years, not only have the income thresholds themselves changed, but so have individuals' positions relative to these thresholds. While in 2023 half of respondents (50 percent) lived below the minimum income needed to make ends meet, this proportion fell to 45 percent in 2024 and remained at the same level in 2025. At the same time, the middle-income category – those between the constrained and average standard-of-living levels – has expanded substantially: their share rose from 24 percent to 44 percent over two years. Meanwhile, the proportion of people living above the average standard-of-living threshold dropped sharply, from 26 percent to 11 percent.

All of this suggests that although the share of people in the lowest income category has not increased further, fewer and fewer individuals are able to reach what they consider an average or above-average standard of living.

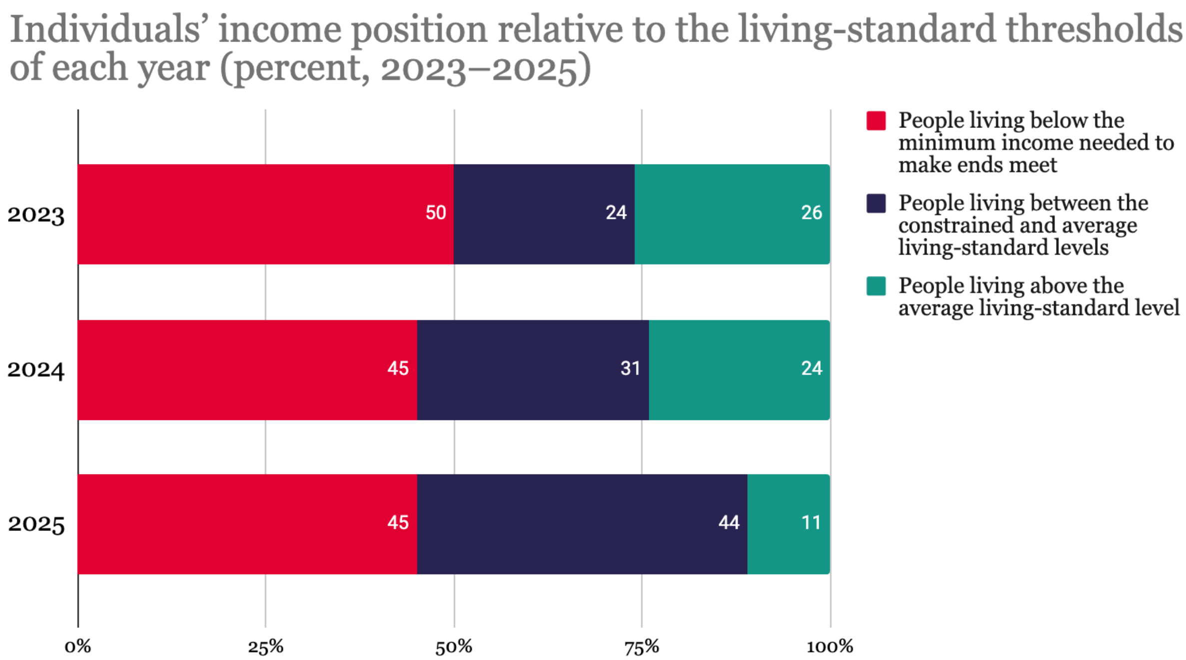

Figure 6. *Individuals' income position relative to the living-standard thresholds of each year (percent, 2023–2025)*

The Equilibrium Institute also examined the extent to which individuals' financial situations influence the amount of income they consider sufficient for the different standards of living. The data show that the better someone's financial position, the higher the amount they deem necessary to make ends meet, to maintain an average standard of living, and to live a carefree life. The differences are largest in the case of the income required for a carefree life: respondents in the lowest income group consider HUF 600,000 (€1,560) sufficient, those in the middle-income range consider HUF 800,000

(€2,080) necessary, while respondents with above-average incomes estimate the required amount at nearly HUF 900,000 (€2,340) (the median for the full sample is HUF 700,000 (€1,820)).

Living Standard	Minimum to make ends meet	Average	Carefree
People living below the minimum income needed to make ends meet	HUF 280,000 (€730)	HUF 414,000 (€1,080)	HUF 600,000 (€1,560)
People living between the constrained and average levels	HUF 350,000 (€910)	HUF 500,000 (€1,300)	HUF 800,000 (€2,080)
People living above the average standard-of-living level	HUF 350,000 (€910)	HUF 600,000 (€1,560)	HUF 883,000 (€2,290)

Table 1. *Amount of Income Considered Necessary for Each Living Standard, by Income Group (median, rounded to the nearest thousand HUF)*

One in Ten Adults Is Severely Exposed to Poverty

According to the Equilibrium Institute's latest research on poverty, nearly half of Hungarian adults (47 percent) face at least one basic financial hardship – whether heating their home, affording regular meat consumption, or covering an unexpected HUF 100,000 (€260) expense. Almost one in four respondents (23 percent) – around 1.8 million people – struggle with at least two of these problems at the same time, while 10 percent of the adult population, roughly 800,000 people, face all three difficulties simultaneously. A total of 1.3 million Hungarians struggle both to heat their homes and to afford regular meat consumption, indicating a persistent sense of financial insecurity in meeting everyday needs.

Problems	Share	Number of People
Heating is difficult *and* cannot afford meat every other day	16%	1,280,000
Cannot afford meat every other day *and* does not have HUF 100,000 (€260)	12%	960,000
Heating is difficult *and* does not have HUF 100,000 (€260)	14%	1,120,000
Affected by all three problems	10%	800,000
Affected by at least two problems	23%	1,840,000
Affected by at least one problem	47%	3,760,000

Table 2. *Proportion and Number of People Affected by Basic Livelihood Hardships*

Why Is the Equilibrium Institute's Research on Poverty Necessary?

The Equilibrium Institute's research on poverty makes it possible to monitor changes in the financial situation of Hungarians on an annual basis, using data-driven insights to identify emerging risks in time.

While official poverty indicators typically become available only with a one-year delay, the Equilibrium Institute's representative survey provides a real-time picture of the processes that shape households' everyday living conditions. The research reveals, for example, how many people in Hungary are able to keep their homes consistently warm, how many can afford to eat meat regularly, and how many would be able to cover an unexpected expense on their own. It also shows how much income people believe is necessary for a constrained, average, or carefree standard of living – and how many of our fellow citizens actually reach these thresholds.

These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of key social dynamics and provide valuable knowledge for policymakers and other stakeholders about where targeted interventions are needed to reduce poverty.

Methodology

The Equilibrium Institute's research on poverty is based on a representative sample of 1,000 adults interviewed in person. Together, the respondents represent Hungary's population aged 18 and above. The results of the public opinion survey may differ by up to ±3.2 percentage points from the values we would obtain if every eligible adult in the country had been surveyed.

Respondents are selected through a two-stage stratified sampling procedure using a fully random method, meaning that every adult Hungarian citizen has an equal chance of being included in the sample. The data collection was conducted by ZRI Závecz Research. Fieldwork period: 13–19 October 2025.

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