

Everyday Life Could Grind to a Halt Within Hours: Hungary Must Prepare for Emergencies Now

Gábor Kaszás | October 7, 2026, 8:14 PM | Index.hu – Economy

Europe is rearming, but the safety of families also depends on whether they know what to do in the first critical minutes of an emergency. Where should we go when an alarm sounds? Where can we seek help if there is no mobile phone signal? Hungary should provide clear, understandable answers to these questions. A prominent investor is calling for a nationwide emergency preparedness program. He believes that strengthening civilian protection should begin by assessing existing resources and educating the population.

Bank card payments, petrol stations, traffic lights, and home heating may seem like separate services—until a prolonged power outage reveals just how interconnected they are. In such situations, the security and stability of everyday life can be disrupted in several ways simultaneously. In an article published on Portfolio.hu, Arie Yom-Tov draws attention to the need to consider civilian protection within this broader context.

His starting point is the war taking place in neighboring Ukraine, which has demonstrated how the consequences of armed conflict can reach civilian life. However, threats can take many forms: cyberattacks, telecommunications disruptions, or incidents affecting critical infrastructure can also place the population in difficult circumstances. Furthermore, a drone crossing a national border may be the result of a technical malfunction or navigation error.

The investor does not conclude from these developments that war is imminent in Hungary. Instead, he argues that the value of preparedness lies in providing practical guidance that can be applied in various emergency situations. Achieving this requires not only functioning government institutions but also citizens who understand what actions they should take.

An Underground Space Is Not Necessarily a Safe Shelter

Yom-Tov emphasizes that Hungary already has civil protection and disaster management systems, while official professional guidelines also address public preparedness and information. In his view, the question is how effectively these elements come together to provide clear, practical instructions that ordinary people can easily follow.

Do we know where the nearest protected shelter is located? Can we recognize when we should remain inside a building and when evacuation is necessary? Is it clear what someone should do if an emergency alert occurs while they are at work, at school, or using public transportation? According to Yom-Tov, these questions require standardized, clearly communicated answers that people can familiarize themselves with in advance.

He would therefore begin the development process with a nationwide assessment. This would examine which metro stations, underground parking garages, basements, and other underground facilities could potentially provide protection for the population. However, the suitability of each location would have to be determined through professional technical inspections.

Factors such as structural integrity, ventilation, accessibility, and capacity would all need to be considered. Emergency exits, as well as the availability of electricity, water, and communication systems, would be equally important. A basement or parking garage does not automatically qualify as a shelter simply because it is underground.

A national database could then be created to document locations that meet the necessary safety standards.

These facilities could be identified on maps, through on-site signage, and via a simple digital platform, ensuring that the information genuinely reaches those who may need it.

Yom-Tov cites Germany as an example of a broader approach to civil protection. A program adopted by the German government in May 2026 allocates €10 billion through 2029 to strengthen civilian protection. This includes improvements to warning and communication systems, drinking water supplies, backup energy sources, and emergency preparedness education in schools.

The lesson from the German approach he describes is that effective protection consists of several interconnected measures. A suitable shelter is only truly valuable if people receive timely warnings, know how to reach it, and can continue to rely on essential services.

Once an Emergency Begins, It Is Too Late to Start Preparing

Drawing on the Israeli example, the author particularly emphasizes the importance of practicing emergency procedures in advance. Within Israel's Home Front Command system, known as Pikud HaOref, instructions are tailored to a person's location, the relevant alert zone, and the amount of time available to reach a protected area.

Different instructions apply depending on whether someone is inside a building, traveling, or outdoors. Yom-Tov believes that this approach could also be valuable in Hungary, while emphasizing that the Israeli model should not simply be copied because of differences in geography and security conditions.

He considers it essential that people know in advance which official information channels to follow, what steps to take, and how to respond if electricity or mobile networks become unavailable. Basic preparedness knowledge could be communicated through schools, television, social media, and local government platforms.

However, he does not propose a fixed budget for a Hungarian program at this stage. He would initially prioritize engineering assessments, technical inspections, database development, signage, and public education. Larger investments would follow in areas where assessments reveal genuine shortcomings. As an interim solution, he also considers rapidly deployable, prefabricated protective structures a possibility.

To illustrate the potential scale of investment, he refers to Hungary's 2025 GDP of HUF 87,307 billion. Of this amount, 0.1% would represent approximately HUF 87 billion, while 0.3% would amount to roughly HUF 262 billion. In his view, the appropriate budget should be determined based on the identified risks and the condition of existing infrastructure.

Alongside shelters, maintaining the continuity of essential services remains a central priority. Backup power supplies, alternative communication systems, and regular institutional emergency drills are important because prolonged disruptions can affect numerous sectors, from hospitals to water supply

networks. Preparedness measures can therefore also protect people who may not need to leave their homes during a particular emergency.

The ideal scenario is that these plans will never have to be put into practice. Nevertheless, developing them during peacetime is essential, when there is still time to learn, practice, and correct mistakes. When an emergency does occur, families need practical knowledge they can rely on.

“Preparedness is not fear. Preparedness is responsibility,” Yom-Tov concludes.

Cover image in original article: An underground shelter in Tel Aviv on April 9, 2026. Photo: Alexi Rosenfeld / Getty Images.

English translation of the article published by Index.hu on October 7, 2026. Website navigation, advertisements and unrelated recommended articles are omitted.