

The Hungarian Constituency Database – a brand new service

In my presentation I would like to introduce the Hungarian Constituency Database we launched last year.

Our Research Service is one of the youngests, it was founded in 2001. Our main tasks are to help the legislation work in our parliament, and to help MPs in their constituency work. To support the latter one we have created the **Constituency Database**.

The source of the idea

The idea of launching the Hungarian Constituency Database first arose at our field trip to the **Research Service of the House of Commons** in London. It was our first time to encounter statistical data on unemployment specifically concerning constituencies. Since we knew that in Hungary there was no database that would provide such data regarding constituencies, we have decided to look into this and find all possible sources of data to create a similar database. Our aim was to set up a user-friendly database that would make this information readily available to Members of the Parliament and their experts.

The election system in Hungary

The Act on the election of Members of Parliament establishes a two-round, mixed election system in Hungary, combining elements of constituency and list election systems. The Hungarian Parliament is made up of 386 members, of which 176, 152, and 58 are elected, respectively, based on constituencies, district lists, and national lists. As the country is divided into 176 constituencies, a single candidate is elected as a Member of Parliament in each constituency. Until last year there was no database that was specific to constituencies, there was no easily available and yearly updated economic and social data by constituencies.

The Constituency Database was created and became available for MPs, as well as their experts, in 2007. We hope that our goal to provide users with accurate, detailed, and up-to-date data on constituencies has been accomplished.

Source of data – The Hungarian Central Statistical Office

The main objective of the Hungarian Research Service – similarly to other research services – is to provide **reliable, fast, and unbiased (party neutral) information**. This new database meets all of these requirements, given that the source of all the data is the Hungarian Central Statistical Office, which is known to supply objective, exact, and current statistics.

The specific source of data in the Constituency Database is one of the special databases of the Hungarian Statistical Office, called the T-Star database. The T-Star database collects the most

important numerical data about all Hungarian cities, towns, and other settlements. The Research Service of the Library of the Hungarian Parliament obtains these data yearly, in the form of an excel file, in which the data is broken down by constituencies. We have decided to ask for **180 different categories**, and every year we get fresh data in an excel table which contains 176 rows (for 176 constituencies) and 180 columns, where the columns correspond to the requested categories. After indexing the appropriate fields we add the data to the Constituency Database.

The categories

When choosing the categories we intended to select ones that are best suited to reflect the economic-social status of a constituency. Our database contains data starting from 1998, and hence these time series indicate the trends and changes, and enable the user to discern the developments that have taken place over time and to make comparisons.

The 180 categories are classified into 16 large groups. These large groups include, for example, healthcare (number of paediatricians, hospital beds, consultations by specialists, etc.), service industry (number of libraries, cinemas, railway stations, etc.), public services (number of flats with plumbing, etc.), demographical changes (births and deaths), and housing stock.

The search

We constructed our database according to three major criteria:

- as simple a structure as possible
- transparency
- easy access and handling

Our intention was to create a search interface that allows even an inexperienced user to express a query easily yet accurately. The names of the constituencies and the categories are listed alphanumerically in browser lists, and can be selected by clicking on them. This is a user-friendly feature that enables users who do not know the exact statistical term to find the data they are looking for. This means that one can make a query by just using the mouse, without having to type anything.

Usage of results

Each search results in a time series, which shows the nominal values and indicates the trends at the same time. The user can put these time series into an excel table in order to make further calculations. These calculations may serve the purpose of highlighting or pinpointing certain facts, trends, etc. By using the simple sum-function, mean-function, or percentage-function, the economic-social attributes of a constituency may become more recognizable or appear in a more dynamic way. The obtained data can then be transformed into charts and graphs, using the available chart wizard. This is an excellent tool which allows the user to present the statistical information in a form that is intuitive and is accessible even to audiences who may not feel very comfortable with numbers and data.

Our potential users – MPs and their experts – can use these data to keep up-to-date and to supplement other information concerning their constituencies. The time series data allows for the comparison of two or more constituencies, or the comparison of a constituency to the county that it belongs to, or to the whole country.

Our Research Service uses this database as well. Whenever we compile a background material on economic or social issues, this database is very useful to demonstrate the trends and progression in a constituency, a county, or the entire country.

Access to the Database

The Database is accessible via the common intranet of the Hungarian Parliament and the Library of the Parliament, called PARLANET. The Database is linked to the integrated system called ALEPH, the ILS of our library, which allows easy access and also facilitates the simultaneous use of these databases.