

# **MUNICIPALITY OF SZEGED**

## **BASIC INFORMATION**

Szeged, with a population of around 161,000 inhabitants, is one of the biggest cities in Hungary. It is located 8 kilometres from the Serbian border, and 18 kilometres from the Romanian border. Due to its geopolitical status, a certain level of multiculturalism has long been an important characteristic of Szeged – the city offers a fine example of coexistence between Romanian, Serbian and Hungarian people. Szeged is the administrative centre of Csongrád County (one of the 20 NUTS-3 regions of Hungary) and the hub of the Southern Great Plain (NUTS-2) region. The majority of the seats of the county-level institutions and organizations are in Szeged, and the entities of the regional level institutional system are concentrated in the city. With twelve faculties, and more than 20 thousand students, the University of Szeged is a key institution in the city, and the biggest local employer.

Szeged is a major economic, cultural and education centre. The number of local businesses exceeds 20 thousand, both industrial (food industry, processing industry, construction industry) and service (info-communication technologies, biotechnology, health industry) sectors are strong. Szeged is also an innovative hub: several sectors with great growth potential such as ICT, life sciences and laser technologies are present. The number of shared service centres is on the rise.

Szeged is decidedly a European city of culture. The Szeged National Theatre, with one of the largest budgets in the country, has three audience boxes and offers one of the best repertoires in Hungary. The musical life of the city is globally renowned. Besides the theatre, the Music Academy and the Szeged Synagogue (the fourth biggest synagogue in the world) await concertgoers. The city has two major libraries: the Somogyi Library and the public collection of the University of Szeged. The flagship of the festivals is definitely the Szeged Open-Air Festival; nevertheless, there is an abundance of programmes throughout the year: beer and wine festivals, the Bridge Fair, the Jewish Cultural Festival and several other cultural and gastronomic events. Szeged boasts numerous museums and exhibition places, including the Ferenc Móra Museum, which is one of the most visited museums in Hungary. (Szeged Pólus 2016)

Szeged is the second largest education centre after Budapest in the country, with more than 40 thousand people studying at one of the numerous secondary and vocational schools, and

the University of Szeged. The presence of bilingual primary and secondary schools ensures a smooth integration of children of foreigners and return migrants in Szeged. The University of Szeged offers hundreds of study courses at bachelor's, master's, and PhD degree level, some available in both Hungarian and foreign languages. Higher education specialisations and adult education courses are also available. According to academic rankings, the University of Szeged is among the world's top 500 universities. The role of the University goes beyond providing education and enhancing R&D activities; it is responsible for patient care in the region as well. (Szeged Pólus 2016)

Interviews with institutional actors reveal that the development of Szeged can be viewed from contrasting perspectives. When it is examined in comparison to the development of other settlements in Csongrád county (NUTS 3 region), Szeged is clearly the most developed city; and in the entire Southern Great Plain (NUTS2 region) Szeged is considered to be the most (or second most) developed settlement. On the other hand, compared to the most developed cities of Hungary (e.g. Budapest, Győr, Székesfehérvár) it is acknowledged that in terms of economic development Szeged cannot compete with them. In general, interviewees consider Western Hungary to be more developed than the region in which Szeged is situated.