

RESEARCH

**REPORTS**

RECOMMENDATIONS

# THE WAGES OF FEAR

## ATTITUDES TOWARDS REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS IN HUNGARY



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## Introduction, methodology

The empirical part of the research is based on three focus group discussions that took place at different locations in Hungary. The three locations were Győr, Szeged, and Budapest. These three locations were intensely exposed to the migration crises during 2015, but each experienced different responses to the phenomena from the local community and civil organizations in the area. Győr is a middle size, economically developed town in the Northwest of Hungary. It is relatively close to the Austrian border, and very close to the Slovakian border. There is a refugee camp at Vámoszabadi, located between the town and the Slovakian border. It was built in 2013, and during the peak of the migration crises in 2015 it accommodated 700 persons. The relative closeness of the Pannonhalma Benedictine Archabbey gives an additional interesting perspective to the location of the focus group. The community of the archabbey hosted refugee families during the most intense months of the migration crises in 2015, and the abbot of the abbey made several public statements about how it is an obligation of Christians to help those in need.

Szeged is a larger size town located in the Southeast of Hungary, very close to the Serbian border. For this reason, it experienced the migration crises in 2015 firsthand. There is a 250,000-strong ethnic Hungarian minority in Northern Serbia that has intense relations with Hungary, and due to the closeness of Szeged, many ethnic Hungarians from Serbia work and study in the town. These ethnic Hungarians often have a dual perspective of the refugee crises; they have experiences about the refugees staying or sent back to the territory of Serbia, while at the same time they see how the Hungarian government has been refusing to accept refugees. In the focus group of Szeged, local people from the town as well as Hungarians from Serbia participated.

Budapest is the capital of Hungary, and has been the primary destination for immigrants since 1990. For this reason, it has a more multicultural identity than the other focus group locations. During the migration crises in 2015, the major railway station of the city served as a spontaneous refugee camp for refugees who were trying to pass through the country for Western European destinations. During those months, people in Budapest were deeply divided on the issue; some urged for state and civil support for the refugees, and others wanted to get rid of the migrants as soon as possible.

The number of participants of the focus groups were between 6 and 8. To select participants, online surveys were sent out in email and on Facebook pages dedicated for local communities. The survey consisted of one question about the attitude towards refugees ('Should Hungary accept refugees from war-struck countries and let them settle in the country?'), and several others about sociodemographic features. The participants of the discussions were selected along the following criteria: gender balance, ages 18-33, average socio-economic situation. Furthermore, we tried to create a balance between those who refuse the idea of accepting refugees and those who have a moderate opinion on the matter. Especially in Budapest, it was very difficult to realize the discussions, as those who had a strong anti attitude were less willing to participate in the discussion.

## Secondary data on the migration profile, migration policy and public discourse

### Migration profile

After the democratic transition of 1989/1990, the position of Hungary in the global migration trends changed, but it did not result in radical in- or outmigration. The opening up of the borders was not followed by a new mass emigration wave from Hungary. Instead of great economic migration, the Central European region rather experienced new forms of moderate migration, among them the migration of national and ethnic minorities. Within that phenomena, Hungary has been the destination country for ethnic Hungarians from Romania, the former Yugoslavia, Slovakia and Ukraine since 1989 (Gödri and Tóth, 2005). In the 1990s, immigration to Hungary was at the level of 13-15,000 persons annually. After the country's EU accession, this number increased to 24,000 persons annually (KSH, 2008).

Immigrants to Hungary arrived from European countries in the largest proportion (70-80% in the 1989-2000s period). The second largest proportion was made up of Asian immigrants: their ratio was the highest in the early 1990s (18%), which went down to 10% in the late 1990s and up to 16% again after the EU accession (KSH, 2008). In 1989, Hungary also joined the Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees. Although approximately 5,500 immigrants from the neighboring countries (who were in 90% ethnic Hungarians) applied for refugee status in the 1990s annually, only around 150 people were granted refugee status (KSH, 2008).

Besides being a destination country, Hungary has also been a transit country since 1989. This aspect was the most important factor for the country during the migration crises in 2015. Since 2006, Europe has been experiencing a gradual increase in asylum applications. Between 2006 and 2013, the number of application fell under 400,000 per year (EUROSTAT, 2017a). Drastic increase happened between 2014 and 2015, when applications jumped up to 130,000 (EUROSTAT, 2017b).

The increased volume of immigration affected Hungary significantly. Being located on the external borders of the European Union and the Schengen zone, Hungary has been a primary destination for both regular and irregular migration. Before the peak of the refugee crises, the summer of 2015, Hungary was receiving approximately 274 arrivals daily. In 2015, Hungary was the second European country after Greece that experienced unseen influx of irregular migrants at its external border. The number of recorded border crossings was 411,515 that year. The average number of arrivals increased by 447%, to 1,500 persons a day by August 2015. During this crises, the Hungarian government decided to build a physical fence on the Hungarian-Serbian (and later on the Hungarian-Croatian) border to prevent unauthorized border crossings. Besides the building of the wall, the government passed several legal amendments aiming to reduce illegal migration to Hungary as well. For example, Hungary designated Serbia as a safe country, therefore apprehended migrants could be sent back to there. Furthermore, Hungary made expedited asylum determination possible, while guaranteed only limited procedural safeguards for applicants. Also, illegal border crossing (including climbing through the fence) was declared a criminal offence, therefore refugees apprehended while climbing could be imprisoned. In the meantime, arrivals increased to over 7,000 a day by September-October 2015. By November 2015, however, as the result of the completed wall and the legal provisions, arrivals dropped to 10 persons a day. Furthermore, a decrease in asylum seeker applications as well as in illegal border crossings in Hungary was also visible. The total of applications fell from 177,135 in 2015 to 29,432 in 2016 (“Migration Issues in Hungary,” 2017).

Restrictive Hungarian legislations continued to have strong impact on the migration and asylum seeker profile of the country after 2015 as well. In 2016, another restrictive legislation entered into force that made it possible for the police to apprehend a foreigner unlawfully staying in Hungary within 8 km of the border. Migrants who get apprehended by the police are sent back to the

closest transit zone where they can submit their asylum application. The new legislation resulted in 19,000 migrants sent back beyond the borders between July and December 2016.

In 2017, two other restrictions entered into force. One of them is that since January, admittance to Hungary is limited to 5 persons a working day per transit zone. The other restrictive rule (March 2017) prescribes that asylum seekers have to stay in the transit zones where they submitted their application for the entire period of their asylum procedures. The legislation affects children above the age of 14 as well, which means that only children under 14 are now protected by the Children Protection Act, children above 14 are handled according to the asylum laws.

The composition of asylum seekers changed considerably during the course of anti-immigration legislation. Before the migration crises' culmination in 2015, most asylum applications to Hungary were submitted by Kosovars (21,453), Afghans (8,796), and Syrians (6,857). During 2015, the number of Afghan and Syrian applications increased drastically, to 64,587 and 46,227 respectively, while Pakistani and Iraqi applications grew from the previous couple of hundreds to around 10,000 in 2015. Kosovar applications in 2015 remained constant to previous years' applications. However, after the drastic increase of applications submitted in 2015, their number dropped dramatically by 2016. The sum off applications went down from 177,135 in 2015 to 29,432 in 2016. Syrian applications fell with 92% to 4979, Afghan applications with 76% to 11,052, and Kosovar applications with 99% to just 135 in 2016.

### **Trends in migration policy**

Since summer 2015, Hungary has been carrying out a restrictive immigration policy that manifests on three levels: a physical level through the installation of a wall on the Hungarian-Serbian and Hungarian-Croatian border, a legislative level through restrictive immigration policy regulations, and a discursive level through the government's anti-migrants and anti-refugee rhetoric.

During the peak of the refugee crises, the Hungarian government decided to build a physical fence on the Hungarian-Serbian, and later on the Hungarian-Croatia border to prevent unauthorized border crossing. The wall was completed by the end of 2015, and a second fence of the double fence system along the entire 155 km of the Hungarian-Serbian border was built by April 2017. Along with the physical control over irregular migration, the Hungarian parliament

enacted several legislations that resulted in reducing immigration to Hungary in drastic volume.

Refugee accepting facilities in Hungary have been transformed since 2015 during the government's anti-refugee policies. Before the restrictions in migration policy entered into force, Hungary accommodated asylum seekers in reception centers. 5 such facilities had operated until 2016. After the physical fence was completed on the southern border, and the restrictive laws entered into force (illegal border crossing declared as a criminal offense, asylum seekers are sent back to the transit zones for the entirety of the asylum application process), the government decided that there is no more need for the reception centers in the country, as all the refugees have to stay in the transit zones. Thus in 2016, the government decided to close some of the reception centers, among them the Bicske camp, which, due to its closeness to the capital, functioned as the location for many integration programs provided by civil organizations. Currently, refugees who claim asylum in Hungary are accommodated in one of the two transit zones by the Serbian border, and are detained there for the duration of their procedure. The transit zone in Tompa hosts families from Syria, Iraq and Arab-speaking countries, as well as single men of various nationalities. The transit zone in Röszke accepts families from Afghanistan, Iran and some African countries, as well as unaccompanied children. ("Migration Issues in Hungary," 2017)

Some of the reception centers still operate. The facility in Vámoszabadi accommodates beneficiaries of international protection, and the maximum days of stay is 30. People staying at the Vámoszabadi center receive meals, but are not entitled to any kind of financial help. Besides that, there are facilities (operated by the Police) that accommodate migrants who enter Hungarian territory in an irregular manner and do not claim asylum. Moreover, if a migrant overstays in the country and has no identification documents, they are also transferred into an alien policing detention center. In these facilities a person can be kept up to two years.

The last type of migrant accommodating facilities are child protection centers. There is currently only one of these operating, managed by the Guardianship Office of Hungary in Fót, close to Budapest. It is open, and accommodates unaccompanied minors apprehended in Hungary, but is supposed to close down by summer 2018. Civil organizations can provide child programs here (education, creative, integration projects).

In February 2016, the Hungarian government initiated a referendum on the EU distribution quota. The date of the referendum was set to October 2. The question of the referendum was: “Do you want the European Union to be able to mandate the obligatory resettlement of non-Hungarian citizens into Hungary even without the approval of the National Assembly?” Starting from March 2017, an intense and aggressive campaign was taking place prior the referendum, in which the government tried to persuade Hungarian citizens to vote “No” at the referendum. The campaign consisted of billboards, TV and radio commercials, as well as online and print ads. The central motif of the campaign was that Hungarian citizens should send a message to ‘Brussels’ in the form of the quota referendum. The referendum ads appeared in the form of the question “Did you know?” followed by statements about the security concerns of immigration (e.g. “The Paris terror attack was carried out by migrants”) or by distorted information about the EU distribution quota (“Brussels intends to make Hungary accept a town-sized number of illegal migrants”).

The turnout at the referendum was 44.04%. As 50% of eligible voters has to cast a vote for a referendum to be valid, the October 2 quota referendum was not valid. However, right after the referendum’s results were official, PM Viktor Orbán announced that the government considers it “valid in a political sense”, because more than 98% of those who participated voted ‘No’.

The government has been pursuing another campaign that, although implicitly and indirectly, but does affect immigration policy. In 2017, the government started an offensive discursive and legal battle against civil organizations in Hungary. The argument of the government is that these organizations are going against the government’s immigration policy; with the (financial and ideological) help of international and foreign institutions and individuals they try to undermine the effectiveness of Hungary’s restrictive immigration policy. The government argues that these institutions collaborate with ‘cosmopolitan’ interests and thus wish to locate migrants with different cultures to Hungary, and, consequently, help the spread of risks of terrorism.

The campaign against civil organizations and NGOs did not stop at the discursive level. The parliament passed a law in June 2017 that requires civil organizations receiving funding from abroad in an amount of more than 24,000 Euro annually to register themselves as ‘organizations financed from abroad’. Besides, these organizations have to place the phrase ‘organization financed

from abroad' on their website as well as on their publications. The essence of the 'civil act' lies not in the actual, practical consequences, it is more about the implicit criminalization and public shaming of these organizations. Even though migrant and refugee helping organizations are among the targeted organizations, and in the government propaganda they appear as the target groups, there are many other organizations and NGOs providing services to less fortunate social groups (charity organizations, child care, elderly care services) that are also under the effect of the law, and thus became 'side-victims' of the government's witch hunting.

It is important to add that the current government's migration policy has to be interpreted within the domestic policy context as well. The government's main ideology is that only the governing party coalition acts in the interest of the Hungarian nation. According to the government's interpretation, all the opposition parties, as well as the European Union do not serve the real interests of Europe and the interests of the nation states making up the EU. Therefore, the strongest message of the government's communication is that Hungarian people have to continue to stand up for their real interests, and only the government can represent the Hungarian people in this regard. The anti-migration policy thus is a perfect field for the government to carry on its narrative about protecting the nation's real interests.

### **Attitudes to migrants and refugees**

The Budapest-based Migration Research Institute carried out an opinion poll (Migrációkutató Intézet, 2016) about attitudes to migrants, more specifically about what people think of cultural differences, of the security risks and challenges associated with illegal migrants, and of the relation of illegal migrants and the situation of women and children. The research was conducted between 14 and 20 September, 2016, with the participation of 1001 informants, and is representative in terms of age, gender, education and location for Hungary's population. The research showed that 79% of the respondents rather agrees that illegal migration represents a threat to women and children, while only 18% said that they rather disagree with the statement. Among the threats associated with migrants, terrorism was picked as the most significant potential risk by 28% of the respondents, and the increase of crime rate in general was picked by 26%. 14% said that illegal migrants increase the risk of violence against women and children, and 13% said that they represent a threat to Hun-

garian culture and identity. Labor market considerations in relation to illegal migrants appeared much less frequently; only 4% said that illegal migration means a threat to Hungarian citizens' job opportunities. The survey asked the respondents what they think about the compatibility of Muslim religion and Hungarian traditions. 52% said that the two are not at all compatible, and an additional 32% said that the two are rather not compatible; thus, 84% believes that the two cultures cannot live next to each other. On the other hand, only 10% thinks that the two cultures are (somewhat) capable to coexist. Similarly, 81% of the respondents said that migrants cannot integrate into European societies and economies, while only 10% said that integration is possible.

Surveys measuring xenophobia have been conducted in Hungary since 1992, and the sequence of these researches show that xenophobia in the country increased drastically after 2015, the culmination of the refugee crises. According to Tárki's research, xenophobia had been on 30% before 2012, it increased to 40% by 2015, and after that it jumped up to 58% within a year, which is an intensity that was unseen before. (Ádám, 2016) Parallel to the increase in the proportion of xenophobic people, the proportion of xenophile and 'moderate' people decreased also drastically since 2015. The level of education and the place where they live have significant impacts on whether people are xenophobic. People in smaller settlements (villages) are more likely to be xenophobic than people living in the capital; and while two-third of people with vocational school education are xenophobic, less than one-third of those with a graduate degree refuse migrants.

Political parties and public actors are divided in the issue. Besides the governing right-wing, conservative parties, the far-right Jobbik party is pursuing the anti-immigrant discourse. Other opposition parties (mostly left-wing and/or liberal formations) are highly critical of the government's stance, and usually emphasize the humanitarian and moral responsibility of the state – that the government is failing to realize. On the other hand, at the quota referendum, only one political party, the Hungarian Liberal Party encouraged voters to vote 'Yes'. The other opposition parties encouraged citizens to boycott the referendum, arguing that the question of the referendum was not clear, and thus the possible consequences are unknown. One alternative (so called joke party) opposition party encouraged people to cast an invalid vote, and by doing so to highlight the ridicule nature of the anti-migration campaign of the government. Interestingly, the proportion of invalid votes was surprisingly high at the referendum, 6.17% (224,668 votes).

### **Public discourse, role of media**

The Hungarian government's strong anti-refugee discourse has been a dividing issue in Hungarian society and public discourse since the humanitarian crises-like experiences of summer 2015. The Hungarian government immediately started an openly anti-refugee and anti-migration discourse that frames the entire issue as a threat to national security and to European/Christian values. As opinion poll results show, this discourse has been "successful" in making the general public more xenophobic. In the government's discourse, refugees are blurred with economic migrants, and the central claim of the government's message is that the people who try to come to Europe in fact want to use the European social and welfare service system, without any intention to integrate and acculturate into the European societies. The only solution to the refugee crises in the government's approach is to help these societies in their original homeland. By constantly repeating the "helping at the origin" idea, the government's politicians act as if the migration crises did not already have consequences at the destination countries, among them in Hungary. As a result, the "helping at the origin" idea is implicitly used as a legitimizing force for actually failing to provide any viable solution or answer to the existing grievous conditions refugees have to face at the borders of Hungary.

On the other hand, the government's approach has been juxtaposed by many civil initiatives, as well it was challenged by some of the opposition parties. Right at the peak of the refugee crises, Hungarian and international civil organizations started to mobilize themselves to provide necessary help for the refugees. In the most challenging days of the crises in the summer of 2015, civil organizations, charities, churches, groups of friends as well as individuals provided food, water, blankets, clothes and other necessities for the refugee families. Here, the framing of the crises was completely different from the government's interpretation. Civil organizations emphasized that the issue is first of all a humanitarian one, therefore to help those people in need is not only a moral, but also a legal obligation.

A similar counteract was visible when the campaign for the quota referendum kicked off. While the government's billboards carried messages about the threats of international migration, the counter-narrative called the attention to the humanitarian catastrophe refugees experienced in their home countries. Some of the counter-billboards tried to highlight the absurdity of the government propaganda; the "answer" to one of the government billboards ("Did you

know? Last year 1,5 million illegal immigrants arrived to Europe.”) was “Did you know? An average Hungarian person sees more UFOs than immigrants in a lifetime”. Although opinion polls as well as party preference polls show that the anti-migration propaganda of the government is appealing to many people, the fact that one of the counter-billboard campaigns was crowdfunded proves that people questioning the government’s approach try to organize themselves and mobilize jointly.

Pro-refugee and human rights civil organizations and NGOs have been very active in pursuing an agenda that contradicts the Hungarian government’s efforts. The Hungarian Helsinki Committee provided the most outstanding case in 2015 when it took up the case of two Bangladeshi men who applied for asylum in Hungary but were sent back immediately to Serbia based on the Hungarian legislation that declared Serbia a safe third country. The two men were held in the transit zone for 23 days. Lawyers of the Helsinki Committee represented the two Bangladeshi men in front of the European Court of Human Rights, and eventually won the case in 2017. The Court ruled that Hungarian authorities violated several articles of the European Convention of Human Rights, first of all by depriving the victims of their liberty, and dismissed the Hungarian government’s argument that the applicants could voluntarily leave the zone in the direction of Serbia, as this could potentially be used against their asylum claims and could amount to refoulement. Furthermore, the Court held that the detention did not have a precise legal basis, which made impossible for the applicants to initiate a proceeding contesting the lawfulness of the detention. The Court also found that the procedure applied by the Hungarian authorities was not appropriate to provide the necessary protection against a real risk of inhuman and degrading treatment. (ECtHR, 2017). According to the decision, the government has to pay 18,705 Euro for each plaintiff, plus it has to reimburse the costs of the lawsuit to the Hungarian Helsinki Committee.

## Results from the focus group discussions

### Experience with refugees and other migrants

#### *Győr*

Participants in the Győr focus group discussion had limited personal experiences with refugees. All of the respondents claimed that they have not had direct contact with refugees. Experiences with refugees in most cases were limited to memories of 2015, when some of the respondents saw the refugee camp in Budapest Keleti railway station during the days of the migration crises, or travelled on trains carrying refugees to the western border. There was an agreement in the focus group that refugees are rarely seen in the town of Győr. The participants mentioned some parts of the town where during a certain period of time, refugees were 'sitting' and 'hanging out' together. In connection with that, they mentioned that the areas where refugees concentrate are heavily polluted and not welcoming. One participant mentioned that once a refugee came up to him and asked for directions, and he evaluated that instant as a positive experience with refugees. Another participant had lived with a family for two months that accommodated a refugee family. This experience was also evaluated as positive by the respondent. A third participant mentioned that his brother is living in Vienna, and that he thinks that the situation in Vienna is much worse, therefore he is satisfied with the refugee situation in Hungary. Another participant said that she saw refugees at the children protection center in Fót, and remembered that experience as very negative, because her impression about the refugee kids was that they are loud, undisciplined, and that they take away the facility from Hungarian children.

Concerning the attitudes of the community towards refugees, participants had diverse opinion on the matter. Some said that the actual community (family, friends, classmates) do not care about refugees that much, the issue is rather perpetuated by the media. Some argued that it is rather the older generation that dislike refugees and the younger generations try to help them, and some argued that it is the other way around. Almost all agreed that both negative and positive attitudes can be traced in the Hungarian society, and only one participant said that Hungarians are nationalists and reject completely the idea of multiculturalism.

During the discussion, examples for negative experiences in the relationship of locals and migrants in Western European countries were brought up repeatedly. Some of the respondents referred to these examples as real experiences, even though they said that what we can see in the media about refugees is not necessarily credible information.

#### *Szeged*

In this focus group, participants living in Hungary said that they have not met any refugees in person. Some of them have met people with migrant origin, and also “Western European pensioners” in their hometowns, and said that these people “do not bother the locals”. One of the respondents claimed that even though refugees did not pass through her town, local people do not welcome any foreigners. She said that locals discriminate strangers based on color, dialect, and information spread by the community.

Other respondents, who live in Serbia (and belong to the ethnic Hungarian minority in the country) had personal experiences with the refugees in 2015. One of them said that she is coming from a Hungarian-Serbian mixed village where people peacefully live together, and they have a history of being very tolerant and welcoming with refugees, since they accepted many refugees during the Yugoslav wars. Still, she said that “99% of the refugees” she saw in 2015 were “aggressive, they molested locals, they were given food, but they sold it and bought alcohol”. She based these opinion on information coming from other local people. She said that she “luckily was not hurt, only verbally abused” by the refugees. Another respondent confirmed these statements, saying that refugees in the center of the town go up to cars and ask for money. “When we did not give them money, they laughed at us. A friend of mine asked them in English why they throw away the garbage, and they answered that it does not matter, as others will pick it up anyway”, she said. Another participant from Serbia (also an ethnic Hungarian) said that she saw a lot of refugees as well, but she did not have bad experiences with them. Still, even though she is aware that it is stereotypical thinking, she thinks about refugees as dangerous people, and would not dare to approach them. Another participant from Serbia said that two years ago she saw migrants every day, she talked to them, and none of them were hostile, “they seemed very communicative”. Still, her relatives complain about the refugees a lot even today.

### *Budapest*

Participants in this focus group discussion almost unanimously agreed that they barely see or notice refugees these days. The only exception was a participant who had worked in a receptionist position in a health care facility, and used to meet refugees and immigrants very often. However, most of the respondents said that except for the months of the 2015 refugee crises, they have very limited experience with refugees. One of them also said that even if they see women with a burka or scarf, they do not automatically associate them with refugees, because they might be living here for a longer time. Concerning personal experiences, the one respondent that had worked as a receptionist talked about her impressions of refugees. She said that she had both positive and negative experiences; some refugee families were nice and friendly, some were “scary” or acting with entitlement. However, she concluded that it is just how humans are; the same experiences can happen with any kind of people, irrespective of their ethnicity. Other participants’ experiences were limited to very short interactions with refugees in the street.

Concerning how people in general relate to refugees, participants agreed that various attitudes are present in the Hungarian society. Some argued that elderly people are more hostile towards refugees because they are more receptive to what they see and hear in the media, and since they mostly watch national channels, they receive a very negative image of the refugees. Some said that people in the capital are more tolerant towards others than people living in smaller settlements. Another argument was that the attitudes are dependent on one’s level of education: people with higher level of education are more empathic and accepting than people with lower level of education. One of the respondents said that ideological views determine how people relate to refugees; conservatives are more rejecting, while liberals are more tolerant. Finally, one of the respondents made a reference to how migrants’ behavior shapes the local people’s attitude; she claimed that if locals see that the refugees are willing to integrate, they will be more accepting towards them. However, many of the respondents thought that there is a lot of negative feelings towards refugees, and that Hungarian people tend to be prejudicial with foreigners.

Respondents agreed that the category ‘refugees’ denotes a very heterogeneous group of people. Some are fleeing from war, some from starvation, some just want to have a better life in Europe. However, they stressed that there are no reliable data or source of information to see the full picture about the situation of refugees.

## Arguments against the reception of refugees

### *Győr*

There seemed to be a consensus in the focus group that there are two types of refugees: the first type is fleeing from war and unhuman conditions, the second type, on the other hand, just sees the opportunity to have a better life and therefore claims to be a refugee. The participants argued that the first type should be helped, even by accepting them in Hungary. The second type of refugees, however, should not be accepted by Europe. The arguments against the reception of refugees were mostly focusing on the negative experiences of Western European countries that had been accepting migrants for a longer time. Many of the participants argued that most of the migrants are not willing to integrate and assimilate, they rather stay in groups and form subcultures. Some raised concerns about the feasibility of Christian and Muslim peaceful coexistence. Some participants mentioned the security risks of accepting refugees, claiming that if there is only one among them who is affiliated with terror groups, Hungary rather should not accept any refugees. Furthermore, some of the respondents argued that refugees do not want to integrate into the host society, they want to maintain their own culture, tradition, and religion. One of the respondents said that Hungary has a lot of issues to solve, issues that are more urgent and more close to the people of Hungary than the refugee challenge. He mentioned the situation of Roma people in Hungary as an example of the issues Hungary should focus on instead of the refugees.

Respondents were asked if they have seen positive examples for peaceful coexistence between locals and migrants. One of the respondents recalled that in Pannonhalma, refugees were trying to integrate into the local community by having started to work and by learning Hungarian. He evaluated that instance as a positive example. He also mentioned his experience in Norway, where he saw that refugees had learnt the language of the country and were working hard to integrate. He concluded that peaceful coexistence can exist if both parties are willing to work on it; refugees need to prove that they are willing to accept the host country's values, and the host country should make them feel welcome, and not put billboards all over the country. The latter part was a clear reference to the Hungarian government's anti-refugee campaign. Some of the respondents agreed that the image of migrants painted by the media and politicians makes it very hard for locals to accept them, and to start working on peaceful coexistence.

Respondents agreed that prejudices and fear could be eliminated if locals knew more about refugees. They also agreed that refugees scare locals if they are in large, concentrated masses. Therefore, they said that it could be helpful to foster peaceful coexistence by giving opportunities for locals and refugees to meet and talk in smaller groups.

#### *Szeged*

In this focus group, argumentation against accepting refugees centered on three main topics: security concerns, incompatibility of cultures, and questioning the refugee status of the migrants. Participants said that since migrants want to enter the country in huge numbers, it is very difficult to properly check their backgrounds and prevent potential terrorists from coming to Hungary. Respondents often brought up how people with Muslim background would not be able to assimilate and integrate into European societies. One of them said: “I have very little trust. They were given the chance, but they destroyed everything. Hungary did a very good job by not letting them in. I know there are good people among them, but if the majority of the migrants behave badly, it is hard to overcome my prejudices.” Another participant confirmed this opinion by saying that it is an utopist view that refugees will assimilate and respect the local culture, and “behave like Europeans.” He also added that even if they are accepted, after a while they should go back to their home countries.

The one participant that was leaning toward letting refugees in said that it should happen only under supervision. She was arguing with a human rights approach in mind: “I think we should give them the chance to live in a sustainable environment.” She also added that intercultural understanding could be fostered with trainings on both sides. “A lot of the prejudices we have against them are generated intentionally for us to hate them.”

#### *Budapest*

The focus group as a whole was not vehemently against accepting refugees; nobody argued that Hungary should not accept any of the refugees. Concerns were raised mainly based on two grounds: the financial burden that supporting refugees means for the country, and cultural incompatibility between European and Muslim cultures. Dominant participants argued that Hungary does not have the capacity to accept “everybody”. They mentioned that the integration and social advancing of the Roma population already is a big challenge for the

country. On the other hand, they admitted that with controlled immigration, we should help those who are fleeing from terrible (war-struck) conditions.

Concerning cultural incompatibility, the idea that migrants do not want to integrate came up several times in the discussion. Participants argued that they would happily support the idea of accepting refugees if they saw that they are actually willing to integrate, and respect the culture and traditions of Hungary. The example of the Chinese minority living in Hungary was brought up as a positive example; some participants found that Chinese immigrants did a great job in learning the Hungarian language and assimilating into the culture. Some participants said that it would definitely help to develop more positive feelings for refugees if they did efforts to integrate, for example by starting to learn the language. Another respondent mentioned that it would be helpful if locals could have personal contact with refugees, because now they are only exposed to the negative billboard campaign. “It would be nice to see them in a situation where they are behaving according to our standards”, he said. Another participant said that Muslim women wearing scarfs is a very daunting sight for her; it makes her think that immigrants will never integrate into the host society. This was confirmed by another respondent, who said that if refugees stick together, they will never integrate into the host society.

Respondents expressed that there would be need for projects where locals and refugees could meet. Some of them said that personal encounters could reduce prejudice and fear on the local people’s side against the refugees. Some of them suggested that there should be events where both the immigrants and the locals can show their own traditions, culture, food, etc. Somebody in the group said that these initiatives should happen within smaller communities, like schools, companies, or residential communities. There should also be opportunities provided for refugees to learn the Hungarian language. One participant suggested a mentor program in which one local could work with one refugee kid or a refugee family and make them familiar with the Hungarian culture. One respondent said that since at the moment the level of xenophobia and rejection is really high, it would be worth to spend money (even if it costs a lot) on integration programs or “meetup” projects. Only two respondents said that there is no need for initiatives that aim to bring refugees and locals closer. They argued that on the refugees’ side, if someone really wants to integrate, they will find a way. On the locals’ side, one of them said that “prejudice is based on personal experiences, and there is nothing we can do to change those.”

## Sources of information

### *Győr*

All of the participants said that their primary source of information about refugees is the Internet and news in the television. Most of them get informed on different news sites or through news appearing on their Facebook walls. Only one participant said that he had firsthand information about the life of refugees while he was living in Norway in a dorm that accommodated refugees (or people of migrant origin, it was not clear, as the two concepts blurred in the participant's stories). While most participants admitted that we cannot know how credible the information is that is mediated by different media sources, many of them claimed that only a small proportion of the migrants are actually running from their home country to save their lives, and a significant proportion is coming to Europe with the intention to abuse the welfare system and take advantage of the better economic conditions.

### *Szeged*

Participants said that their source of information is primarily television and internet. Many of them agreed that the Hungarian national TV channel is spreading government propaganda, it is manipulative, and therefore it is worth listening to or reading other sources. However, many said that their family watches only the national TV channel. One of them said that he reads online news sites that are more liberal or left-leaning, and some of them said that they also read international independent media. The Telegraph, BBC News and EuroNews were named as reliable sources. Some of them also claimed that people in their family and friends watch or read only the local news. One participant said that she only gets information from Facebook posts. She also said that "the people I know on Facebook I trust them. If they take pictures and post them about something, I believe them. One of my friends took pictures of migrants peeing on his wall, and I do believe it is true, as I have known them for a long time."

Participants agreed that people in general are very easily influenced by gossips, and they do not care about looking behind of what they hear. "For a lot of people, it is easier to echo those than to start thinking", one of them said.

Some of the participants argued that media makes generalizations about migrants, but there was a disagreement whether it is a positive or a negative

generalization. Some said that the media is depicting refugees as negative, and instead of 'refugee', the term 'migrant' or 'economic migrant' is applied in most of the cases. Another respondent added that refugees are depicted as dirty, uneducated, and aggressive people by the media. Others said that liberal news sites are mostly pro-immigration. Many respondents claimed that they try to double check the information that they read or hear.

#### *Budapest*

Respondents in the group overwhelmingly rely on online sources about refugees. Some mentioned that they talk about the issue with friends, especially with friends from abroad. They said that they do not watch television, and only some of them talk about the issue in the family. Respondents more or less agreed that the information that they get through the media should be treated with reservations; news are distorted, and even if the media shows footages about refugees, the interpretation of what is happening cannot be trusted. Very few of the respondents had personal experiences with migrants. Only one participant had met refugees frequently through work, the others occasionally saw refugees, mostly in the summer and autumn of 2015.

### **Attitudes towards hate speech and violence against refugees**

#### *Győr*

Respondents said that they did not have any direct experiences about violent conflicts between locals and refugees. On the other hand, many of them highlighted instances when the behavior of migrants legitimately fueled dislike towards them on the side of the locals. One of the participants recalled an instance when, during the summer of 2015, policemen were distributing water for the refugees, but they, instead of being grateful, threw the bottles at the policemen. Another respondent said that her ex-boyfriend was a soldier and he had to face a lot of inconveniences because of the refugees. For example, in the winter of 2015, soldiers at the southern border had to guard the refugees in the extreme cold weather, while refugees were accommodated in heated tents. "He could not come home for 6 months, he had to be outside in -40 Celsius, but the migrants could stay in heated tents, because we help them", she said with clear anger in her voice. These instances served in the argumentation as proving why people's negative attitude towards migrants are understandable and le-

gitimate. Others emphasized that people who dislike migrants actually do not dislike the people, but the consequences of having them around. For example, one of the respondents said that since the migration crises, her friends with migration or Roma background have been handled with more suspicion by the authorities and by everyday people as well. Another respondent said that it is not the migrants themselves who are disliked by people, but the mess and dirt that they leave behind themselves once they leave the country.

One of the respondents said that in the summer of 2015, locals in Hungary rejected refugees without any distinction or consideration for why they were actually running away from home. He said that people in Hungary even disliked those migrants who were trying to integrate in Hungary, started a job, etc. He said that this antipathy stemmed from the government's propaganda which encouraged anti-refugee feelings in local people. Another participant, on the other hand, said that she does not think it plausible that Hungarians would attack migrants, she can only imagine it happening the other way around.

#### *Szeged*

In this focus group people did not encounter physical aggression towards refugees. Some of the participants talked about prejudices about refugees. One of the respondents said that people in the local community distinguish between 'migrants' and 'refugees', and they are more empathic with refugees. However, local people can be jealous of the financial support the refugees receive, and therefore start rumors, for example about migrants breaking into houses. Another participant said that the antipathy towards refugees stems from the negative media campaign: "Those who watch only Hungarian state media, especially the elderly people, are brainwashed. The general attitude is that migrants only arrive here to diminish European culture." She also added that the more educated people are, the less likely they are to hate migrants. Another participant confirmed this opinion, saying that educated people are more likely to think critically. He also said that uneducated people tend to associate migrants with terrorism.

Respondents said that since the fence was built on the border, people in their localities do not expect to meet with refugees, so they are peaceful. However, people do talk about migrants, and they resonate to the Hungarian government's messages about the issue. One of the participant said that, basically, since the general opinion is in accordance with the government's

actions, people feel safe and therefore are not aggressive towards refugees. One participant from Serbia said that in there, the issue is not even part of the public discourse, as the country is more focused on becoming part of the European Union.

### *Budapest*

Respondents in the focus group recalled instances of violence or physical conflicts between local people and refugees that they learnt about through the media. One of them talked about a piece of news that she heard some years ago, and according to which refugees raped a Hungarian girl on a train. Others talked about the instances when the Hungarian police at the border beat up migrants, adding that the media sometimes distorts these kinds of information. Some shared stories heard in the family or from friends and that create antagonistic feelings towards refugees: “One of my relatives, who works in Germany, had to wait 5 hours at the Austrian border the last time, because they were checking everybody very thoroughly because of the illegal migrants who want to go to Germany.” Another participant said that the other day she was waiting in line for an hour at a public office, and a refugee family, instead of waiting for their time in line, made the public servant deal with their case first. She said that these instances of entitlement make local people wonder why we should accept these people. The “entitlement” issue was addressed in other respondents’ contributions as well. As a concern, one of the participants shared that her friends in Sweden do not dare to go to the streets after dark, and that the only reason why Hungary is not facing this challenge is because “we shot down the border and did not let them in”.

They also listed examples of how refugees are depicted by the media, and how that shapes local people’s opinion about them. The most frequent stereotypes that respondents recalled were ‘terrorists’, ‘stinky’, and ‘dirty’. One of them shared with the others that during 2015, some of his classmates were commuting to school to Budapest, and whenever they had to cross the territory where the refugees were stationing by the railway station, they were in constant fear of getting robbed.

On the other hand, participants listed many positive examples of peaceful coexistence. The participant that used to be working as a receptionist told the others that she met a lot of friendly and kind refugee families. Another participant recalled a positive experience at school when he almost entered into a

conflict with another student of immigrant background, but the tension was resolved because the other student handled it very nicely.

### **Response to pro-refugee arguments**

#### *Győr*

Respondents were leaning toward the opinion that accepting refugees is only supportable if the refugee is an actual refugee, i.e. fleeing from war or horrible conditions. On the other hand, they admitted that it is rather hard to decide who qualifies into that category. One of the respondents argued that since only a very few portion of the migrants does actually need help, Hungary should not risk and thus should not accept any refugees. Other respondents pointed out the security risks of migration and recalled that the perpetrators of one of the recent terror attacks passed through Hungary. Another participant said that only those people argue for the acceptance of refugees who has not had any negative experience with them in their families. Moderate opinions reflected neutral approach, claiming that the issue is too complex to be able to deliver a straightforward opinion. Only one of the respondents pointed out that Hungary as a country was made up of very diverse people who after a while assimilated and became Hungarians. Furthermore, Hungary is facing a population decline, while migrant-sending countries are overpopulated, therefore it is logical that Hungary should accept some refugees. Even though at first it might cause some conflicts, it would turn out to be a good solution, just as it happened in the past history of the country.

In terms of migrants enriching the host culture, none of the respondents said that it would be true for Hungary. Out of the seven respondents, five firmly refused the idea that refugee's culture would enrich Hungarian culture. They argued that Hungary has to protect its own culture, and instead of supporting other cultures, we should preserve our own traditions. One of them – the women who was the strongest to reject the idea of accepting refugees – even sarcastically mentioned that the only matter in which refugees are better than Hungarians is using weapons. They also said that the money spent on the integration of migrants should rather be spent on Hungarian social problems, education, and health care. These participants also argued that migrants are poor and unskilled, therefore they would not contribute to the economic development of Hungary either.

Only two participants said that, hypothetically, refugees could enrich Hungary's culture, but even these two concluded that it would not work in practice. They argued that Islam and Christianity are too far from each other, and because of the distance between the two cultures, nothing enriching could come out of the coexistence. One of them also added that Hungarians would not be open to the Eastern culture brought by the refugees, because Hungary is "Americanizing", and thus Hungarians rather want to embrace Western, American culture than that of the refugees.

#### *Szeged*

In this focus group, respondents who strongly oppose the reception of refugees argued that they know hardly anybody who has a pro-refugee approach. One of them pointed out that the migrants that passed through Hungary were in fact not miserable people: "their pockets are full, and we wonder where all that money comes from. Also, how do they have iPhones?" The argument that refugees are not actually people in need appeared in another respondent's contribution as well, and she also added that the money spent on migrants should be spent on Hungarian citizens. The 'against' side's other argumentation focused on the security concerns of migration. One of the participants described refugees as people "growing up with machine guns in their hands". Another participant said that it is very difficult to decide which migrant is a potential threat to the security of the country, and since they arrive in huge numbers, "Hungary does not have the means to handle the situation."

Intertwined with the security concerns, the third major argument against refugees was the incompatibility of Christian and Muslim civilization. One of the participants said that the Judeo-Christian culture is endangered by the presence of migrants. Another respondent said that she had heard a lot of stories about how refugees harass women. She added, "none of my friends were involved, but I was still looking for a place to hide when I saw them." It was brought up by another respondent – who otherwise was not completely rejecting the idea of accepting refugees – that the majority of migrants are "young and healthy men, and only a very few of them are women." She also added that she felt sorry for women and children being in such a vulnerable situation, yet she could not help but be suspicious because of the large proportion of single men.

Concerning the possible contributions of refugees to the host country's economic and cultural life, only one respondent delivered a positive opinion, all the others were skeptical. One leading argument was that migrants are lazy and do not want to work, therefore they are actually a burden on Hungarian economy, and not a boost. Although they admitted that there is a shortage in workforce in Hungary, most of the participants believed that accepting migrants would not bring a solution to that challenge. One of the respondents said that only a small proportion of the migrants want to work, and it is impossible to filter those people out of the mass. They thought that instead of locating migrants in Europe, factories should move to the migrant-sending countries, to create job opportunities there, and thus stop migration to Europe. They also agreed that Europe is facing a demographic crises, yet they refused the idea to locate young people here. Instead, one of the respondents said that "the solution to the demographic crisis is not immigration, but family support policies". The only respondent who thought that accepting refugees could be beneficial for Hungary argued that Hungarians also work abroad, "Hungarians build Germany", so if there is no workforce here, these works must be carried out anyway, so migrants can help in this matter."

#### *Budapest*

Most of the participants in the focus group argued that Hungary does not have the capacity to accept all the refugees. Many said that first the country's economic and social situation should be developed to be able to accommodate refugees. "I'm against illegal and unlimited immigration, because there is always aggression of there is too many of them," said one of the participants who argued for controlled immigration policy.

Also, some of them said that refugees who are fleeing from war should be accepted first, those who are 'economic migrants' should not. Another dominant argument was that we should help those countries where refugees come from so they do not have a reason to emigrate. One of the participants said: "If they all come here, who will stay there? They should stay in their homelands and work for a better future there, just as Hungarians did after 1990. We created a lot of development with hard work." Only one participant was trying to grasp the bigger picture and talk about global responsibility in connection with global inequalities.

Concerning the pro/refugee argument that immigrants enrich the host culture, two participants strongly rejected the idea and claimed that Hungarian culture does not need to be enriched. “The 1000-year-old Hungarian culture is good enough for me”, said one of them, adding that although he is interested in other cultures, she does not want the refugees’ culture to be forced upon her. Most of the participants represented a more moderate stance in this regard. One of them said that social and cultural changes are normal, it just should not be abrupt and sudden; people need time to accept changes. Also, local people have to be certain that refugees are willing to accept the host society’s basic values. “We are happy to help, but in exchange we expect them to accept our rules.” Another participant said that he is aware that the appearance of new members in communities brings a lot of “color” and positive changes. However, he needs time to process those and therefore can be frustrated before and while the change is happening, even though he knows that the outcome will be good. Others argued that refugees’ culture would become an integral part of Hungarian culture, just as it happened with Roma culture. On the other hand, one of the respondents said that it is a realistic threat that refugees would not become inherent to Hungarian culture but create subcultures, which would augment racism and xenophobia in Hungary.

In connection with the economic contribution of migrants, respondents were rather skeptical. They argued that providing financial assistance for migrants means a higher expenditure than the profit they might bring to the country. “To provide them subsidies is not the right form of help”, one of them said. Some argued that Hungary has already social groups that rely on the state’s financial help, refugees are just topping these social needs. “If they want to stay here, they have to start acting like useful citizens, start to work, etc.” Two participants, on the other hand, argued that with special trainings or job/matching programs, refugees could mean a relief for the shortage of workforce in the country.

### **Other country specific issues**

All the three focus group discussions revealed that very few people in Hungary have actual personal experiences about refugees or migrants, even though all three locations had been exposed to the refugees at least during the critical months of 2015. Encounters with migrants are almost exclusively reduced to occasional conversations in the street. Despite the limited personal interactions with them, stereotypes about refugees are deeply embedded in the minds of participants.

The typical arguments against refugees centered around three themes: security concerns, incompatibility of cultures, and the financial burden of acceptance. Out of the three arguments, concerns about the civilizational incompatibility were the most accentuated. Most of the participants in all the three groups argued that migrants do not want to integrate and assimilate, furthermore, they not only want to maintain their culture, but they also want to force it onto the host society. This idea has been spread aggressively in the government's media campaign. Interestingly, this argument was echoed by those participants as well who were not entirely against the acceptance of refugees.

The security risks of accepting refugees were emphasized more strongly in the two focus groups carried out in the smaller towns, but not so much in the Budapest group. Stereotypes about refugees being involved with terrorist organizations were delivered to a larger extent in the two groups of Szeged and Győr. In the Budapest group, arguments against the hosting of refugees were more strongly centered around the financial expenses refugee integration puts on the country.

The role of media in shaping people's attitude towards refugees was admitted in all three groups. There seemed to be a consensus in all the groups that news about refugees should be treated with reservations, as media on both sides (conservative vs liberal; government vs opposition) tends to distort information.

Participants in all three groups were aware of the Hungarian government's negative propaganda about immigration. People who had a moderate view on the issue of accepting refugees often claimed that the negative campaign has a destructive effect on the future of the relationship between locals and refugees because it deepens stereotypes and fuels hatred. Interestingly, even those who were not arguing for unconditional acceptance said that the government's propaganda is unnecessary. However, those who were strongly against accepting refugees did not comment on that.

The idea that not all migrants are refugees have been present in the participants' argumentation extensively. Even those who were not entirely against refugees often said that there are two groups of refugees: those who are actually running away from war, and those who just saw the opportunity for a better life in Europe. This approach also closely correlates with the Hungarian government's message about migrants. Many times participants argued that a real solution would be to help those countries that are migrant-sending countries, and thus refugees would not have a reason to come here.

## Conclusions, recommendations, good practices

Hungary has been pursuing a strong anti-refugee policy since 2015. This policy has three levels: a physical level by the building of a fence on the Southern border of Hungary; a legal level through various anti-immigrant legislations that resulted in a radical drop in the number of refugees entering the country; and a discursive level through a negative media campaign about refugees that targets the dominantly conservative, not very tolerant electorate of the governing party. Successive opinion polls have shown that Hungarian citizens in an increasing percentage support the government's restrictive immigration policy. Polls also show that the level of xenophobia has been increased in the past few years; from the pre-2012 30% it went up to 40% by 2015 and to 58% by 2016. Parallel to the increase in the proportion of xenophobic people, the proportion of xenophile and 'moderate' people decreased also drastically since 2015. These developments are probably in strong correlation with the government's negative propaganda about migrants.

In the focus group discussions we could see how most participants see only "real" refugees (viz. refugees of war) as legitimate (or legal) migrants, and how "economic" migrants are rejected by most of them. This approach of categorizing migrants gained ground extensively, and can be traced back to the government's propaganda about refugees.

With the exception of a few participants who strongly opposed the acceptance of refugees, participants of all focus groups proved to be constructive about coming up with ideas about how peaceful coexistence could be developed between locals and immigrants, and how prejudices could be tackled. One of the major argument of the respondents was that seeing large masses of refugees scares them. Therefore, participants argued that encounters in smaller groups could be effective in this regard.

Furthermore, many participants emphasized that mutual dedication for peaceful coexistence would be crucial. As said earlier, it seems to be a deep prejudicial conviction of participants that refugees are not willing to integrate and assimilate, and come here with the intention to force their culture on the host society. Therefore, they argued that they "need to see" that refugees are willing learn about Hungarian culture and traditions to believe that they do not represent a threat to Hungarian culture and tradition.

During the discussions many participants made references to the Western European countries' experiences with immigrants. These argumentations were mostly aiming to point out that it is impossible to integrate Muslim people into European societies. However, beyond these argumentations, some respondents shared their own personal experiences about living abroad and seeing

people with immigrant background speaking the host country's language and being integrated into the host society. The discrepancy between the two argumentations is probably not realized by the respondents.

This observation may lead to the conclusion that personal experiences about peaceful coexistence might not be enough to repel prejudice and fear. It seems that people tend to distinguish between the micro and macro level; even though they might have positive experiences on the micro level, they might not be able to project these experiences to the macro level. There seems to be a need to help people become more conscious and reflective about what they see and experience, and how positive experiences can be interpreted in a wider, social context,

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