

Hungary Background Analysis

INTEGRATION AND PARTICIPATION OF MIGRANTS IN HUNGARY

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Executive Summary

Hungary is in a very controversial position regarding migrants' integration and their opportunities for civic and political participation. Historically Hungary has been considered a net sending rather than a receiving country regarding migration, however from 1990, the country started to attract more migrants especially from the neighboring countries, and some other countries, like China. In 2015 large number of asylum-seekers entered Hungary, however considered the country as a transit country towards the wealthier Western European countries. (Gödri et al., 2014). Since the refugee crisis in 2015 Hungary accepted only a bit more than 1,000 beneficiaries of international protection but doubled the number of migrants for economic and study purposes.

In 2021, foreign citizens only represented 2% of the total population of Hungary, showing an increasing tendency since 2015 when foreign nationals accounted for only 1.48% of the population. Almost half of the foreign nationals (45%) are living in Budapest, accounting for around 5% of the capital's population. In 2020 third-country nationals made up 1.2%, while EU citizens 0.8% of the Hungarian population. Since the 2015 refugee crisis, Hungary only accepted a bit more than 1,000 beneficiaries of international protection to the country, in 2021 beneficiaries of international protection were counting only 5,110 people, accounting for 0.05% of the total population (KSH, n.a.).

Despite the low number of foreigners staying in Hungary, especially the low number of beneficiaries of international protection, starting from the 2015 refugee crisis, anti-immigration has had a central position in the political narrative. In 2015 the government answered to the large number of asylum-seekers by starting to build a fence along the border to stop "illegal migration" and set up transit zones, which asylum-seekers weren't allowed to leave. Parallely to the human rights abuses and anti-immigration policies and practices, since 2015 the government has been conducting a public campaign against foreigners, especially against beneficiaries of international protection and asylum-seekers. In 2015 a country-wide poster campaign was launched against migration together with a national public consultation on immigration and terrorism suggesting a direct link between these two. This negative campaign was continuing in 2018, when the number of asylum applicants already decreased below 1,000 people. As a consequence, the country was accused that it used an anti-immigration rhetoric that fueled "xenophobic attitudes, fear and hatred", and that "civil society organizations have also been subject to intimidation, stigmatization and smear campaigns" (Mijatović, 2019). Even today the narrative on the presence of foreigners, especially refugees remain very negative and politically contested in Hungary, even though asylum applicants dropped below 200 in the last years (European Commission, 2022).

From 2008 to 2014 beneficiaries of international protection could access pre-integration and integration services and could stay in the reception centers for 6 + 6 months. Between 2014 and 2016 the integration contract was introduced which was based on a general cash benefit to beneficiaries of international protection. In 2013, Hungary's Migration Strategy was released for the period of 2014 to 2020 to create a guideline for the country's actions for the integration of migrants into the Hungarian society. The strategy highlights migrants' rights and duties and foresees the introduction of a more comprehensive integration policy, however this has not been created or implemented since then. This results in that the country currently has no integration policy or program for newcomers, including no language training (UNHCR, 2019).

Hungary is quite progressive in terms of migration if we consider laws and rights, however, the situation regarding integration policies and especially the implementation of integration services is very unfavorable. According to the MIPEX analysis, migrants in Hungary have some basic rights and security, but not equal opportunities as citizens. Of the 8 policy areas, education scored 0 points, meaning one of the worst in the MIPEX countries, since there is almost no support in Hungarian schools to address the needs of immigrant pupils. The second weakest area was political participation, as migrants have no opportunity to participate in public life in Hungary and do not receive any support from policymakers (MIPEX, 2020). Equality in practice is not working, and integration of migrants is hindered by structural barriers, as there are many pre-conditions to access certain services that only Hungarian citizens can meet (Vadasi, 2018).

Examining the different areas of integration including employment, housing, education and healthcare, the lack of integration policies, the lack of Hungarian knowledge and the structural barriers hinder integration the most. Generally, there are no integration services including no Hungarian language training or any other training including job-skills training for migrants, as well as no training for policymakers, public administrators, teachers, social workers, healthcare workers, employers or anyone who are in contact with migrants, hence migrants are responsible for their own integration. Therefore, civil society organizations have been having a very important role in integration. In 2018 the AMIF funds as well as other EU-funded projects aiming to facilitate the integration of migrants were frozen and with a negative public campaign and an accepted law, civil society organizations assisting asylum-seekers became criminalized. Although integration services, such as job-skills training, language learning, and mental health support are still provided by CSOs, they need to face a hostile environment and the lack of funding from the government (Vadasi, 2018).

The lack of data hinders the analysis of migrants' conventional participation in Hungary. There is some statistical data on the number of foreigners staying in Hungary, however, they are not allowed to vote on national elections. Beneficiaries of international protection and migrants with permanent residence permits are allowed to vote in the local government elections, but there is no separate data on their participation. There is no available data regarding most of other issues for naturalized people and second-generation migrants as they are treated as Hungarian citizens in the statistics, hence their participation could only be assessed by surveys. There have been no initiatives to involve migrants in decision-making. On the local level the last initiative to set up a consultative body was created in 2012, and fortunately recently local governments in Budapest are getting more open towards migrants in contrast to the national attitude.

Regarding migrants' non-conventional participation two important phenomena should be highlighted in Hungary. First is that most of the institutionalized organizations that engage in refugee or migrant assistance are run by Hungarian citizens. The second is that immigrants tend to be entrepreneurial, but their participation in NGOs is lower than the locals'. Most of the organizations with a migratory background do not define themselves as an organization dealing with migration, which is more common for the Hungarian organizations that work on a project-base to support integration. Organizations with a migrant background in Hungary are rather created on a cultural-ethnic or religious basis to do cultural activities, not for advocacy or political purposes Kováts (2012). Civic participation appears to be typically low among migrants, but participation may be higher for people who no longer have a refugee status and have been living in Hungary for a longer period to maintain their traditions by doing cultural activities. Some previous and recent exceptions can be found for migrant organizations supporting migrants' integration and participation, but their operation is limited. Barriers to civic or political participation of migrants in the Hungarian context include that many migrants, especially refugees consider Hungary as a transit country, so they do not want to invest in something for the short term. Also, there are reactive public policies from the government on those who wish to participate, and there is a hostile political situation in Hungary that prevents migrants to engage in any political or civic activity. On the other hand, active participation can have advantages as well, resulting in connections, knowledge of the political and legal system, more confidence, and political and civic participation can shape the relationship so that migrants and members of the host society can become equal partners (Gerő, 2021).

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1. The Hungarian context of migration

1.1. A brief history of migration in Hungary

After 1949 when the massive displacements of WW2 finished in Hungary, the area of state socialism brought extremely restrictive border control. Leaving or entering the country was only possible with special permits, and these restrictions resulted in the illegal border crossings of Hungarians to Austria. In 1956, a revolution against Soviet rule broke out and the border towards Austria opened for three months when around 176,000 people left Hungary, more than half of them were from Budapest and many of them were highly educated young adults, resulting in that 11% of the university students emigrated from Hungary. They were recognized as refugees based on the 1951 Geneva Convention, but it should be noted that besides political reasons, many of the people fleeing Hungary emigrated for economic reasons to settle in Western Europe and America. Following the 1956 revolution, immigration and emigration were not universal rights but were decided on a case-to-case basis, many times were authorized because of marriages with foreigners and some cases of labor immigration within the Eastern Bloc, and some politically favored refugee groups like Chileans were let in. In total, the sum of outward migration during the whole state socialist era from 1945 - 1989 was estimated at around 430,000, while the total immigration was estimated at around 52,000 (Gödri et al., 2014).

From the late 1980s, Hungary started to open and attract migrants and transit migration, as well as out-migration of Hungarian citizens started to increase with the introduction of the right to freely travel abroad. Immigrants arrived in Hungary mostly from neighboring countries from repressive regimes, especially ethnic Hungarians and their successors from Romania, Ukraine, and Yugoslavia. The unfolding of the Balkan war resulted in that non-ethnic Hungarians like Bosnians, Serbs and Albanians also arrived in Hungary and applied for asylum. Parallely other non-European immigrant groups started to arrive to Hungary, such as Chinese and some Middle Eastern nationalities to create small businesses in Hungary (Gödri et al., 2014). From 1990 to 2010 these patterns did not change much, and most migrants arrived from neighboring countries (European Commission, 2022). Hungary became to change from a net migrant sending to a net migrant receiving country, most of the migrants lived in Budapest, and close to the border. Emigration from Hungary started to increase again after 2004 when the country got admitted to the European Union and Hungarians entered the labor market of other member states (Gödri et al., 2014).

From 2015 huge attention has been paid to migration and a negative attitude has been developed towards migrants, especially towards refugees. In 2015, many asylum-applicants entered Hungary, and a negative campaign started against “illegal migrants” and later against civil society organizations who support them. From 2016 the number of asylum applicants started to decrease, however a fence at the border was built and in 2017 the controversial transit zones got introduced, where asylum applicants were obliged to stay without having access to any pre-integration services, most of the asylum-applicants were bypassing the transit zones and continued their way towards Western-Europe. In 2020 the transit zones got closed because the EU Court of Justice delivered the judgement that there was unlawful detention of asylum-seekers (Pósfai-Szabó, 2021). Since the closure of the transit zones in 2020, it is almost impossible to file an application for asylum in Hungary, which resulted in that in 2021 there were only 40 asylum applicants. These toughening legislations contributed to the phenomenon that Hungary has an “asylum system without refugees” (Vadasi, 2018).

Parallely another phenomenon is that since 2015 the volume of migrants arriving for employment and study purposes supported by the government has been increasing and almost doubled between 2015 and 2021. The presence of third-country nationals (TCNs)¹ remains marginal, consisting of only 1.2%, and beneficiaries of international protection only 0.05% of the total population. Despite all these developments, the narrative on the presence of foreigners, especially refugees remain very negative and politically contested in Hungary (European Commission, 2022).

¹ Third-country nationals (TCNs) are residents who are not citizens of the European Union or who is not a person enjoying the European Union right to free movement (citizen of Norway, Island, Lichtenstein, Switzerland) (European Commission, n.d.).

1.2. A look at the numbers

1.2.1. Number of foreign citizens living in Hungary

According to the data of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH, n.a.) in 2021 194,491 foreigners were staying in Hungary, including all foreign citizens who had a valid registration, a residence permit or had a refugee or subsidiary protection status in Hungary. In 2021 foreign citizens represented 2% of the total population of Hungary (9,7 million), showing an increasing tendency since 2015 when foreign nationals accounted for only 1.48% of the total population. Almost half of the foreign nationals (45%) are living in Budapest, accounting for around 5% of the capital's population (1.7 million).

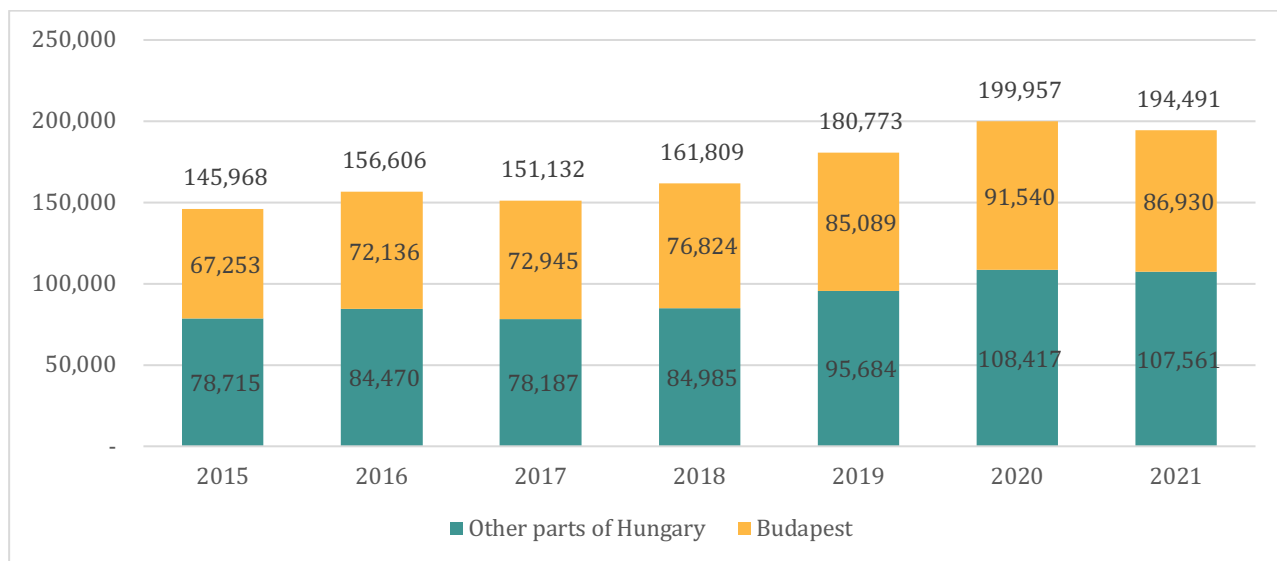


Figure 1: Number of foreign citizens in Budapest and other parts of Hungary
Source: Own editing based on KSH (n.a.)

In 2020 third-country nationals made up 1.2%, while EU citizens 0.8% of the Hungarian population (Eurostat, 2021). In the same year, most of the foreign citizens staying in Hungary came from European countries (66%) followed by Asian countries (27%), African countries (4%) and American countries (4%). The two largest foreigner groups are Ukrainians, accounting for 15%, and Chinese, representing 10% of the foreign population in Hungary (KSH, n.a.).

Country of origin of foreign citizens in Hungary	Number of foreign citizens in Hungary (thousand)	% of the foreigners in Hungary	% of the total population
Romania	22.2	11.1%	
Germany	18.2	9.2%	
Slovakia	10.6	5.3%	
EU27 total	77.5	38.9%	0.8%
Ukraine	30.3	15.2%	
Europe Total	131.3	65.7%	
China	19.7	9.8%	

Asia Total	53.1	26.6%	
America Total	7.6	3.8%	
Africa Total	7.3	3.6%	
Australia and Oceania Total	0.7	0.3%	
TCNs Total	122.1	61.1%	1.2%
Total	199.7	100%	2.0%

Table 1: Number and country of origin of foreign citizens staying in Hungary in 2020
Source: Own editing based on KSH (n.a.) and Eurostat (2021)

Income generating is the most common purpose for staying in Hungary, counting 71,000 and including most of the Ukrainian and Chinese citizens as well (European Commission, 2022). Immigration for income generating purposes and student immigration have almost doubled since 2015. Only 5110 people, around 0.05% of the total population are enjoying international protection, more than half of them are living in Budapest.

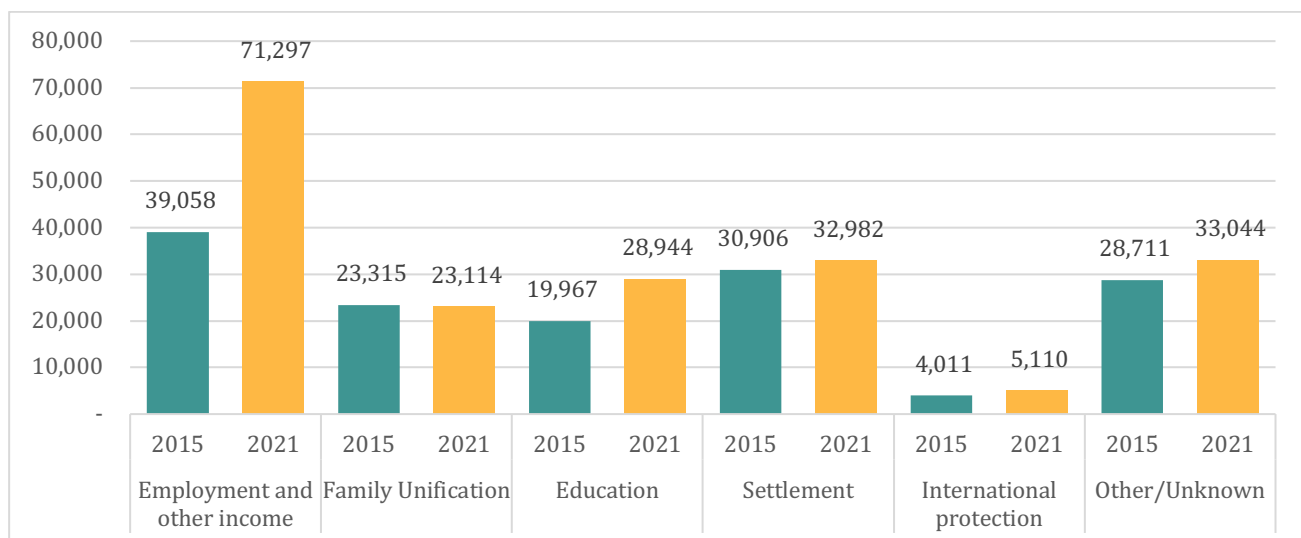


Figure 2: Purpose of staying of foreign citizens in Hungary
Source: Own editing based on KSH (n.a.)

1.2.2. Statistics of beneficiaries of international protection

In 2015, at the peak of the refugee crisis, 177,135 asylum applications were registered by the Hungarian refugee authority, while only 146 people were granted refugee status, 356 people were recognized as beneficiaries of subsidiary protection and 6 people were granted humanitarian protection status. In 2016, when the number of asylum applicants reduced to less than 30,000 people, the number of granted statuses only slightly decreased. Since 2018, there were less than 1000 asylum applications every year, in 2021 only 40 people applied for asylum. Overall, the majority of the asylum-seekers came from Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Pakistan and Iran (National Directorate-General for Aliens Policing, 2022b).

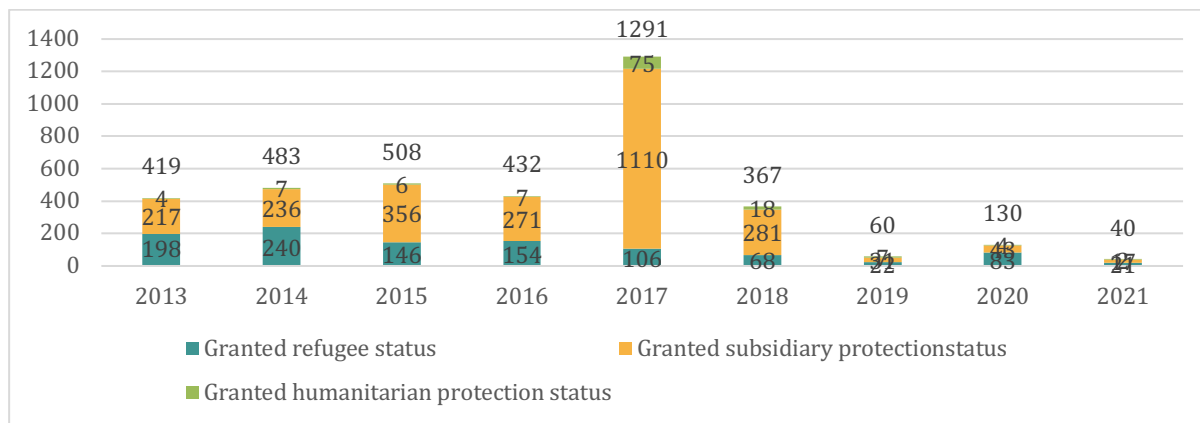


Figure 3: Number of granted refugee, subsidiary protection, and temporary protection statuses
Source: Own editing based on KSH (n.a.) and National Directorate-General for Aliens Policing (2022b)

Country of origin of asylum-seekers in Hungary	Number of asylum-seekers in Hungary								
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Afghanistan	2,328	8,796	46,227	11,052	1,432	274	197	25	6
Iraq	63	497	9,279	3,452	812	239	171	16	N/A
Syria	977	6,857	64,587	4,979	577	48	20	9	N/A
Pakistan	3,081	401	15,157	3,873	163	30	27	24	N/A
Iran	61	268	1,792	1,286	109	29	23	8	8
Other	12,390	25,958	40,093	4,790	304	51	62	35	26
Total	18,900	42,777	177,135	29,432	3,397	671	500	117	40

Table 2: Number and country of origin of asylum-seekers in Hungary
Source: Own editing based on KSH (n.a.) and National Directorate-General for Aliens Policing (2022b)

1.3. The legislation on migration

1.3.1. Legislation regarding asylum-seekers and beneficiaries of international protection

From 2015 to 2020 Hungary arbitrarily detained asylum seekers in the border transit zones, meaning that asylum-seekers must have agreed to remain in the transit zone or lost the possibility of lodging an asylum application. The Court of Justice of the European Union ruled that this practice was illegal, therefore in 2020 the transit zones got closed. Until the closure it was possible to apply for asylum upon arrival at the border at the transit zones, however, now it is almost impossible to file an application in Hungary, this option is only open for people who are already staying in the country but did not enter illegally, meaning they are either detained, family members of a refugee, or having subsidiary protection wishing to receive a refugee status. In other cases, the police redirect everyone illegally arriving at the border to the diplomatic representation in the country from where the border crossing happened. In practice this means asylum seekers need to apply for asylum at the Hungarian Embassy in Kiev or Belgrade resulting in that in 2020 there were 117 and in 2021 there were only 40 asylum applicants in Hungary.

Currently asylum applicants in Hungary get a humanitarian residence permit and need to stay in the open reception centers (Community Shelter at Balassagyarmat, Reception Centre at Városszabadi), or upon specific request at a private accommodation. In case of staying in an open reception center, asylum applicants can only leave the center for a maximum of 24 hours without a special request and are entitled to receive food or cash-benefits (for a maximum of 8 months) basic healthcare, can work in the reception centers, or at a public employment position within 9 months or at another employer after 9 months. Children up to 16 years have the right to attend kindergarten and primary or secondary education (UNHCR, n.a.).

Under Hungarian law refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection are considered as beneficiaries of international protection. Refugee status is granted to people who would be subject to persecution in their country of origin based on their race or nationality or membership in a specific social, religious, or political group. Subsidiary protection can be granted to those who do not qualify as refugees, but they would risk serious harm by returning to their country of origin (National Directorate-General for Aliens Policing, 2019). Refugee status used to be granted until Hungarian citizenship was granted or until the beneficiary withdrew and no longer wanted to enjoy the protection, however, since 1 June 2016, the immigration authority has the right to review refugee and beneficiary of subsidiary protection statuses in every three years (UNHCR, n.a.).

Alternatively, a humanitarian protection status can be granted, that is similar to the tolerated status of other countries and is reviewed every year. A temporary protection status, a special arrangement issued by the parliament in case of emergency, can be received as well if it is not safe to return to one's home country. Temporary protection has not been granted since 1998 (Vadasi, 2018) until March 2022 for people fleeing the Ukrainian war (Hungarian Helsinki Committee, 2022).

Beneficiaries of international protection enjoy the same rights as Hungarian citizens with some statutory restrictions, such as only Hungarian citizens have the right to vote at the national elections and be employed in positions where Hungarian citizenship is prescribed as a pre-condition by the law, including most of the public sphere. Refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection enjoy the same rights and benefits with some minor differences, such as refugees can apply for citizenship already after 3 years of continuous stay in the territory of Hungary in contrast to the normal procedure of 8 years, as well as they are entitled to vote on the local elections (National Directorate-General for Aliens Policing, 2022a).

1.3.2. Residence permits

National permanent residence permit can be issued to third-country nationals after residing in Hungary continuously and legally for at least 3 years and they can prove that their subsistence is ensured, have secure accommodation and access to healthcare services. Spouses and dependents of third-country national gaining a permanent residence permit can apply with more favorable conditions. Beneficiaries of international protection do not receive residency permits but receive ID cards and address cards to verify their permanent address.

By having the permanent residence permit instead of the temporary one, third-country nationals enjoy additional rights, such as the right to reside in the territory of Hungary indefinitely, engage in employment without a special permit, enter without a visa and reside in the territory of Schengen Member States not exceeding 90 days in a 180-days period. Further rights include voting on local elections, access to healthcare with the same conditions as Hungarian citizens (with temporary residence permits it is only possible if a TCN is employed at a Hungarian company or attending a state university). Alternatively, TCNs can apply for an EC residence permit, if they have been legally and continuously residing in the territory of Hungary for at least 5 years, or at least 2 years in Hungary and 5 years at another EU member state (National Directorate-General for Aliens Policing, 2022a).

1.3.3. Citizenship

According to the Act LV of 1993 on Hungarian Citizenship, Hungarian citizenship can be acquired by right or through naturalization. A non-Hungarian citizen can be generally naturalized after passing the constitutional studies exam in Hungarian language and residing in Hungary continuously at least for eight years, has a clean criminal record, sufficient means of subsistence and secure accommodation.

There are some exceptions for instance to applicants who have lived with their Hungarian spouse in the same household in Hungary for at least 3 years, who have been adapted by a Hungarian citizen, whose minor is a Hungarian citizen or who have been granted a refugee status by the Hungarian government. People under these exemptions are entitled to apply for a Hungarian citizenship after residing in Hungary continuously for at least 3 years, however they still need to meet all the other criteria.

Since 2011, simplified naturalization is possible as well to non-Hungarian citizens whose ascendants were Hungarian citizens or who are able to verify being of Hungarian origin and having sufficient proficiency in the Hungarian language. In the case of this procedure, there are no criteria for continuous residence in Hungary and for proving to have a sufficient means of subsistence and place of abode in Hungary. As of 2019 since 2011 more than 1,1 million foreign national ethnic Hungarians has gained Hungarian citizenship via simplified naturalization, the majority being Romanian nationals (European Migration Network, 2019).

This high number does not necessarily mean the inclusiveness of the Hungarian society, as most of these new Hungarian citizens in fact do not live in Hungary. The below table shows the number of foreign citizens who actually had a Hungarian address when they gained their Hungarian citizenship. Only between 2011 and 2015 almost 650,000 people were naturalized without a Hungarian address in contrast to the almost 61,000 people who had a Hungarian address (KSH, 2017). In 2011 99%, in 2020 88% of the naturalized citizens were from Europe, especially from neighboring countries with a high Hungarian population. In 2020 466 people were granted Hungarian citizenship who had a citizenship from a non-European country, many of them were from Vietnam, Egypt, Iran, Mongolia, Syria, and Nigeria (KSH, n.a.), however, it is difficult to estimate how many citizens, especially TCNs gain Hungarian citizenship without the simplified naturalization process.²

Country of origin	Number of foreign citizens gaining Hungarian citizenship with a Hungarian address									
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Romania	15,658	14,392	6,999	6,200	2,605	2,874	1,757	2,123	1,822	1,058
Slovakia	414	307	202	310	208	282	136	223	260	234
EU27 Total	16,290	14,895	7,326	6,704	2,922	3,260	2,012	2,512	2,247	1,402
Serbia	1,678	1,330	647	410	158	144	93	105	88	52
Ukraine	2,189	1,765	894	858	386	365	186	192	142	82
Europe Total	20,356	1,765	894	858	386	365	186	192	142	82
Iran	7	14	11	16	10	21	10	11	21	13

² For instance, in the last 3 years, we can see that more and more Americans were granted Hungarian citizenship, the countries are not specified by the Central Statistical Office, but according to news articles containing interviews with the president of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee, many Venezuelan citizens with some Hungarian origins gained citizenship in a simplified naturalization process. <https://24.hu/belfold/2019/03/05/ki-a-magyar-akit-a-kormany-akar/>

Mongolia	18	9	8	20	18	13	19	28	12	10
Syria	7	11	10	57	21	11	21	15	13	5
Vietnam	38	29	15	67	39	36	46	87	100	62
Asia Total	133	117	96	273	191	176	181	239	222	148
USA	17	13	9	25	13	17	10	17	25	25
America Total	42	36	24	77	62	45	30	86	198	147
Egypt	2	6	9	81	93	101	119	191	103	124
Nigeria	3	9	5	15	13	11	7	5	7	7
Africa Total	21	49	49	164	158	155	163	225	162	170

Table 3: Number of foreign citizens gaining Hungarian citizenship with a Hungarian address
Source: KSH (n.a.)

The naturalization procedure is regulated by legislation but not transparent as it is not bound by deadlines.³ Decisions are made between 3-8 months, but it can happen that there is no answer for a year. The decision does not contain any reasoning and there are no remedies against the decision, the applicant need to submit his/her application again (Vadasi, 2018). It is also important to mention that the Constitutional Examination is very difficult, according to an interviewee one of the refugee-led Hungarian migrant associations, called Next Step Hungary organizes trainings to prepare applicants to the exam, but when he attended the training, eventually only 1 person decided to try the exam who has been living in Hungary for 20 years as a refugee, has a Hungarian wife and this was not his first trial, as the exam is very difficult and costs around 200 euros. It is possible to get exemptions from this exam, such as gaining an elementary school certificate, that can also be complicated because only some of the elementary schools accept migrants, hence the waiting list is long (Mustafa, interview, 24 March 2022).

1.4. Public and social attitudes towards migrants in Hungary

Despite the low number of foreigners staying in Hungary, especially the low number of beneficiaries of international protection, starting from the 2015 refugee crisis, anti-immigration has had a central position in the political narratives. In 2015 the government answered to the large number of asylum-seekers by starting to build a fence along the border to stop “illegal migration” and set up transit zones, which asylum-seekers weren’t allowed to leave. Parallely to the human right abuses and anti-immigration policies and practices, since 2015 the government has been conducting a public campaign against foreigners especially against beneficiaries of international protection and asylum-seekers.

In 2015 the government launched a country-wide poster campaign against migration with slogans like “If you come to Hungary, you cannot take away Hungarians’ jobs”, and “If you come to Hungary, you have to respect our culture!”. These posters were all in Hungarian addressing the Hungarian population to generate fear and hate rather than to address the newly arriving migrants who do not speak Hungarian. In the same year a National public consultation on immigration and terrorism was launched, suggesting a direct link between these two.

³ As of March 2022, applications can be submitted to the local government who needs to send it to the Immigration Office that has the responsibility to forward it the Interior Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister. After their decision the application is sent to the President of Hungary who needs to decide in 3 months (Vadasi, 2018).

The negative public campaign was continuing in 2018, before the national elections, new posters were created, the most controversial one only featured a stop sign and an image of a mass of male refugees from 2015. In the same year consultation on the “Soros Plan” was launched, accusing the billionaire of financing NGOs and international organizations and flooding Hungary with illegal migrants. Furthermore, an anti-immigration legal package called Stop Soros was accepted that criminalized civil society organizations and human rights defenders that assisted asylum-seekers and promoted migration (Vadasi, 2019).

The Hungarian government was criticized heavily by Human Rights organizations that it created xenophobia and violated human rights, such as the transit zones were deemed as illegal by the European Court of Justice. A report done by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights highlighted that the country used an anti-immigration rhetoric that fueled “xenophobic attitudes, fear and hatred”, and that “civil society organizations have also been subject to intimidation, stigmatization and smear campaigns”. It further emphasizes that because of the low number of asylum-seekers arriving to the country it no longer needs to maintain the “crisis situation due to mass migration” (Mijatović, 2019).

It is very important to emphasize here again, that while in 2015 there were 177,135 asylum-seekers in Hungary, in 2018 only 671 when the negative public campaign was one of the strongest. Therefore, the negative attitude towards migrants especially towards beneficiaries of international protection is not fueled by the large number or the conflicts with foreigners staying in Hungary, but more by the anti-immigration campaign that portrays immigration as an enormous threat to Hungary and to Europe and is still active in 2022, while only 40 asylum applications were filed in 2021.

Until 2014 a positive trend could be observed regarding the attitude towards migrants in Hungary, however this has drastically changed from 2015. In 2016 the country again became the second-most opposing country of all those that participated in the European Social Survey, and attitudes towards migrants and refugees took a negative turn within all the examined social groups. It is important to highlight that amongst those with up to secondary school education, living in towns or small villages or on farms are most rejective toward immigrants and refugee, however, their attitudes are not shaped by real, interpersonal experiences as in the country there are very few refugees, who are mainly concentrated in Budapest (Németh, 2021).

If we look at the Eurobarometer, a collection of cross-country public opinion surveys conducted every half year on behalf of the EU Institutions, in 2021, 32% of the Hungarian respondents named health, 31% economic situation and 30% immigration as one of the two most important problems the EU needs to face. Health and economics were also named as the most pressing issue by the average EU respondents, however only 18% of the EU27 average considered immigration as well. Interestingly only 7% of the respondents of Hungary considered immigration amongst the two most pressing issues in Hungary. Before the pandemic in 2018 when the refugee influx already significantly decreased, 56% of the Hungarians still considered immigration amongst the two most important issues in the EU as opposed to 38% of the EU27 average, and 24% considered as one of the biggest issues in their own country as opposed to the 21% of EU27 average. This is in line with the Hungarian government’s narrative that immigration is a very huge threat in the EU, however Hungary is successfully fighting against it. In the special barometer regarding integration of immigrants in the EU conducted in 2018, only 9% of the respondents said that they have friends who are immigrants⁴ and living in Hungary, as opposed to the EU27 27% average. 63% responded in Hungary that immigration is rather a problem, as opposed to 38% of the EU27 average, 74% responded that immigrants are burden for the welfare system, 65% that they worsen crimes, 50% that they take jobs away from workers, which percentages are all a lot higher than the EU27 average, while only 37% said that immigrants help to fill jobs, 32% that they enrich cultural life, 28% that they bring new ideas, which numbers were a lot less than the EU27 average. Finally, it is important to highlight that only 41% said that fostering integration is necessary in the long run for Hungary, as opposed to the EU27 average of 69%,⁵ Hungarian surveys by TÁRKI also confirm these findings, as the

⁴ In all the mentioned questions from this survey an immigrant is defined as a person born outside the EU and currently legally staying in an EU country

⁵ All the different Eurobarometer fact sheets for Hungary can be downloaded from the European Commission’s site, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/screen/home>.

proportion of xenophobes has increased in Hungary from 15% in 1992 to 53% in 2016, and significant differences in willingness to reception can be observed depending on the reason for fleeing. Family reunification is the most accepted reason, while the escape of unemployment and the persecution for following the Islamic religion are the least accepted (Németh, 2021).

QA9 There are different views regarding the impact of immigrants on society in (OUR COUNTRY). To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? Overall, immigrants...

(%)

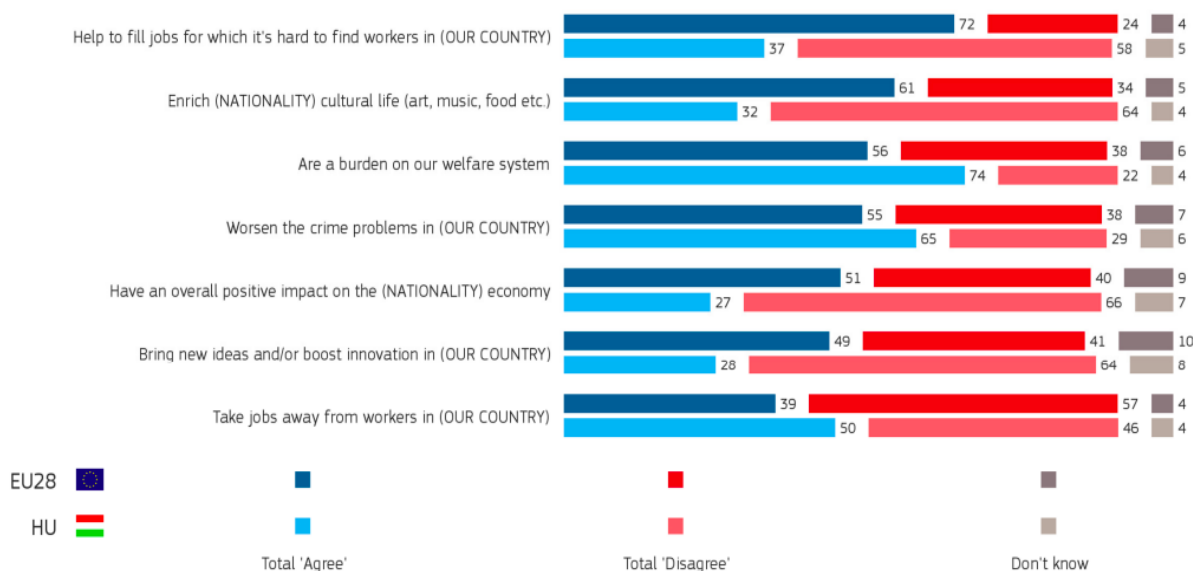


Figure 4: Attitudes towards immigrants in Hungary and in the EU27 average in 2018
Source: European Commission (2018)

It is very important to note however that parallelly to the general anti-immigration and anti-refugee narrative by the government, there are positive initiatives as well, that are contrary to the general rhetoric. These are mainly for people who are connected to the Hungarian population based on their origin, or their religion. Example for these is the support of specific refugee groups, like the evacuation and integration of Venezuelan refugees who have Hungarian origins, or the setting up of a secretariat to support and provide scholarships for persecuted Christians around the world. Furthermore, certain immigration cases are framed differently by the government, for instance TCN students are invited and supported by scholarships, as well as seasonal workers from Ukraine are invited because of labor shortages (Gerő, 2021). Thanks to these measurements, even though the number of immigrants is increasing, especially for employment and study purposes, however it is not communicated openly by the government, and the general narrative still stays anti-immigration.

1.5. Integration policies and services for migrants in Hungary

1.5.1. A brief history of integration policies and integration services in Hungary

From 2008 to 2014 refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection could stay in the reception centers 6 + 6 months to receive basic social support. During this pre-integration period, they were entitled to social, healthcare, education, and cash benefits in an institutional setting. To get their life sustenance and other benefits, they had to attend compulsory 520 hours language training sessions and had to register as jobseekers at the local employment office. As a disadvantage bureaucratic administration hindered beneficiaries to access the support (UNHCR, 2019).

Between January 2014 and June 2016, the integration contract was introduced. The integration contract was signed by three parties involving the beneficiaries of international protection, the local Family Support Centre and the Office of Immigration and Nationality (European Commission, 2022). The integration contract was based on a general cash benefit for maximum 2 years, distributed 4 times in a six-month period, reduced by 25% after every six months. The cash benefit was higher than in the previous integration system, however, beneficiaries of international protection could only stay in the reception centers for 2 months, and their cash benefit was reduced if they became entitled for any other benefit, hence a big proportion of the beneficiaries left the system or were discouraged to engage in a lawful employment.

Since the termination of the integration contract there has been no pre-integration or integration support and beneficiaries of international protection can stay in the reception center for only 30 days to organize their necessary documents, such as obtaining an ID card, health insurance, tax documents, organizing housing, but are not entitled to any integration support or services, including no support in Hungarian language learning. This new system is based on the principle that foreigners should not enjoy more entitlements and support than Hungarian citizens (UNHCR, 2019).

In 2013, Hungary's Migration Strategy was released for the period of 2014 to 2020 to create a guideline for the country's actions for the integration of migrants into the Hungarian society. The strategy highlights migrants' rights and duties and foresees the introduction of a more comprehensive integration policy, however this has not been created or implemented since then. This results in that the country currently has no integration policy or program for newcomers, including no language training (European Commission, 2022).

Civil society organizations hence have been having a very important role in integration. In the absence of a formal integration strategy an 'informal social contract' existed until 2018, meaning a framework in which the refugee authority granted the international protection status and afterwards civil society organizations implemented different programs and projects to support and facilitate the integration of beneficiaries of international protection as well as other foreigners in Hungary. These projects were financed mainly by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF). In 2018 the AMIF funds as well as other EU-funded projects aiming to facilitate the integration of TCNs were frozen, calls for proposals were withdrawn, and civil society organizations were no longer invited to forums and consultations regarding the work of the Fund (Vadasi, 2018). Integration services, such as job-skills training, language learning, and mental health support are still provided by CSOs, which needs to face a hostile environment and the lack of funding from the government.

1.5.2. Hungary's performance in the MIPEX and NIEM international migrant integration indexes

The Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) measures policies regarding the integration of migrants in 8 areas in 56 countries across 6 continents including all EU Member States. In 2019 Hungary has scored 43/100 on the MIPEX ranking which is below the EU as well as the total average of 49 of the 56 MIPEX countries. Integration in Hungary was classified as 'equality on paper', as similarly to other Central and Eastern European countries, migrants in Hungary have some basic rights and security, but not equal opportunities as citizens.

Of the 8 policy areas, education scored 0 points, meaning one of the worst in the MIPEX countries, since there is almost no support in Hungarian schools to address the needs of immigrant pupils. The second weakest area was political participation with 15 points, as migrants have no opportunity to participate in public life in Hungary and do not receive any support from policymakers. Policies are slightly unfavorable regarding labor market mobility, health, and access to nationality, halfway favorable regarding family reunification, while favorable regarding anti-discrimination and permanent residence, in which categories the country has a leading position in Central Europe (MIPEX, 2020).

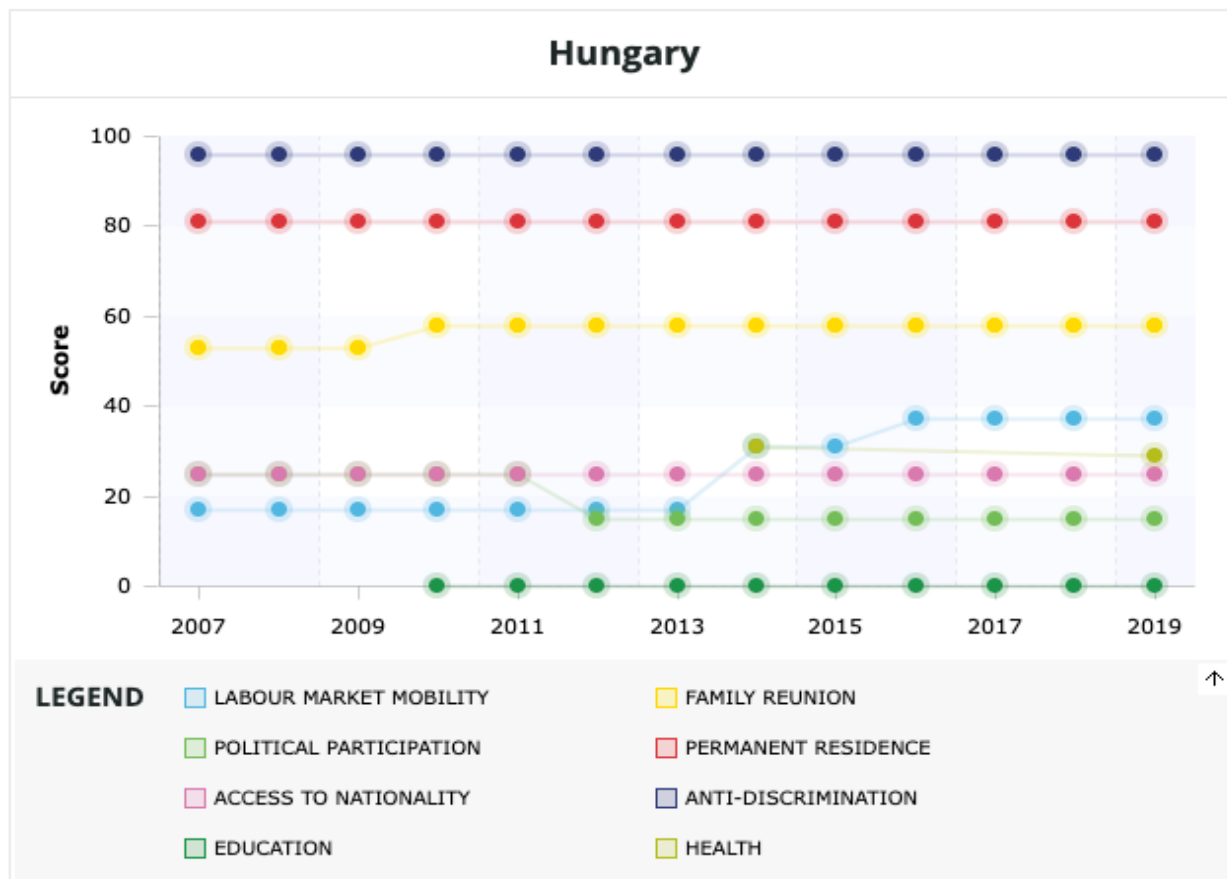


Figure 5: Hungary's scores in the MIPEX ranking
Source: MIPEX, 2020

The National Integration Evaluation Mechanism (NIEM) is a six-year-long transnational project taking place in 14 EU member countries aiming to prepare the key actors in the integration field to face current challenges and create better migration and integration policies based on reliable data. After the release of the baseline report in 2016, a comprehensive report was created for the period of 2016 to 2019 to assess the existing situation of integration of beneficiaries of international protection in Hungary based on 168 indicators (NIEM, n.a.).

The NIEM report was concentrating on 12 dimensions and the legal framework, policy framework, and implementation and collaboration connected to these dimensions in the examined countries.⁶ To summarize the results, it is very important to mention that Hungary does very well regarding most of the indicators if we only look at the legal framework, however the policy framework is not supportive and regarding implementation and collaboration, the country is amongst the lasts. To provide some examples of the main areas of integration, on a scale from 0-100, regarding health, the country received 100 points for the legal framework, a bit less than 40 for policy framework, and 0 for implementation and collaboration. Regarding education the points in the same order are 87.5, 16.7, 0, regarding vocational training and employment-related education are 50, 20, 0, regarding employment are 62, 16, 0 and regarding housing are 82, 10, 0 (Wolffhardt et al., 2020).

⁶ Within the scope of the project, Menedék, the Hungarian Association of Migrants has created 10 publications including policy analysis to further access the Hungarian situation regarding the relevant fields of migration (Menedék, 2021). The rest of the chapter will rely on these publications, as the only available recent comprehensive study about integration policies in the field of migration. The publications can be found here: <https://menedek.hu/hirek/niem-szakpolitikai-elemzesek>

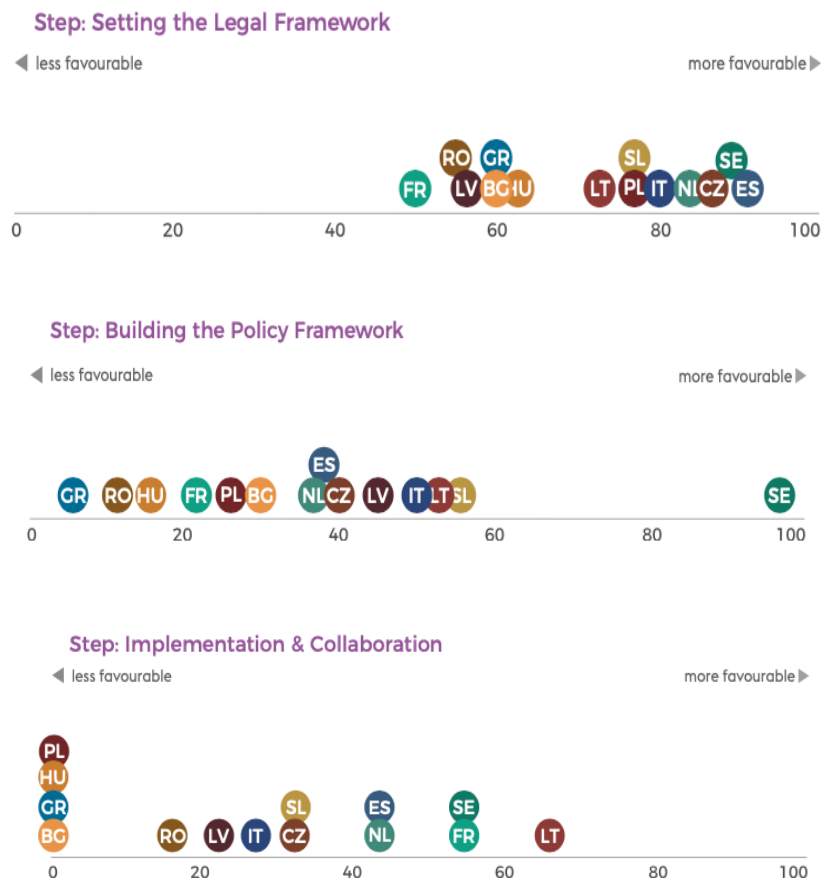


Figure 6: Example of the results of the Employment dimension of the 2019 NIEM report
Source: Wolffhardt et al. (2020)

Equality of rights does not mean equity nor means that beneficiaries of international protection can enjoy the same rights in practice. There are language barriers, but no public programs for Hungarian language learning or intercultural orientation. Officials of authorities and employers are not educated and aware of the rights of beneficiaries of international protection and migrants. An interview with an Afghan refugee revealed that one of the main reasons why he wants to have Hungarian citizenship is to enjoy the same rights as Hungarians in practice as well. He provided some examples like difficulties in accessing healthcare with his documents, or when arriving back from Iran, the border controllers caught him as they were not aware of his rights as a refugee (Mustafa, interview, 24 March 2022). There are structural barriers as well as there are many existing preconditions with which beneficiaries of international protection can't or can just partly meet. (Vadasi, 2018). The situation detailing integration policies and implementation regarding the main areas of integration are detailed in the following subchapters.

1.5.3. Areas of integration

Housing

In the 2013 Migration Strategy the topic of housing is emphasized however, the legislation and framework of financial support has been changing in almost yearly making it difficult for decision-makers and social service providers to follow them. Furthermore, the roles and responsibilities of the different actors, such as state and civil actors, has been constantly changing (Pósfai – Szabó, 2021).

From 2008 beneficiaries of international protection could spend 6 + 6 months in the reception centers and afterward could apply for a housing support for 2 years. From 2014, beneficiaries of international protection could receive financial support for 2 years but were only allowed to stay in the reception centers for 2 months (UNHCR, 2019). Parallely, 8.75% of the AMIF Funds were separated for the improvement of housing of beneficiaries of international protection, where on one hand the local family support center's role was to ensure that the funding reaches the families who need it, and on the other hand civil society organizations could apply for developing and implementing programs for the housing of migrant communities. In 2016, the integration contract got terminated and from 2018 the AMIF funds were frozen, hence housing programs by CSOs got more limited.

Currently, beneficiaries of international protection are entitled to the same subsidies in the field of housing as Hungarian citizens, however these are extremely limited. After their status is granted, beneficiaries of international protection can stay in the reception centers for 30 days, but afterwards they receive no support as no state activities remained in the field of housing assistance. The legislation provides for equal rights, however social housing represents only 2.6% of the total housing options in Hungary, which are restricted as local governments many times require at least a year-long residence on their territories to access these opportunities.

Finding housing on the private market is hindered by many factors. The Hungarian private rental sector is under-regulated and there are quickly increasing rental prices. Language barriers are one of the main difficulties, as well as migrants have no locational knowledge, there is prejudice and discrimination against them, and beneficiaries of international protection's labor market situation is unfavorable. A further barrier is that many owners especially in Budapest do not allow their renters to indicate the apartment as the permanent address, which would be necessary for migrants to apply for social services. These factors all result in that many owners prefer not to rent their apartments to foreigners or if they do, they ask for more guarantees. The only option for beneficiaries of international protection who leave the reception centers and can't access the private market is to access the homeless shelters or temporary homes for families. Obstacles regarding these include that homeless shelters in Hungary are usually open for men, hence it is more difficult to satisfy the needs of the refugee women arriving alone to Hungary. Organizing housing for older people who do not work anymore is challenging as well, as they are not entitled for pension, because they did not serve 20 years in Hungary. Family unification is a challenge too because different family members would end up in different institutions.

As a solution, CSOs support migrants by giving information, providing financial support, and finding temporary accommodations. Furthermore, the housing of beneficiaries of international protection is sorted out by informal connections based on language, ethnic, or religious similarities. Solidarity actions within the different communities include the crisis accommodation by the Somali community, shared private renting, and accommodation in a workers' hostel. In addition, 'foreignness' is a solidarity-building factor, foreign landlords and citizens who themselves also emigrated to foreign countries tend to be more open to rent houses for migrants (Pósfai-Szabó, 2021).

Employment

Similarly to housing, successful integration in the field of employment is not solely based on integration policies and services, but is driven by market forces. In line with the European Union's legislation, beneficiaries of international protection enjoy equal rights as Hungarian citizens regarding employment including access to employment and work conditions, and can be employed without a work permit, the only requirement is to provide statistical information. An important exception from equal rights is that they may not hold any position or perform any duties that are legally linked to Hungarian citizenship. From the 4 million employed Hungarians around 800-860.000 people are employed in the public sphere, where Hungarian citizenship is the condition of employment (Vadasi, 2018).

Employment is one of the most successful areas of integration thanks to the developments of the Hungarian economy and labor market. After joining the EU, many Hungarians migrated to Western Europe for better wages, and at the same time, Hungary had significant economic growth, especially in labor-intensive sectors like construction and trade and tourism. Despite the anti-immigration public campaign, the country is in fact in a labor shortage so rely on foreign labor. Most of the foreigners come to Hungary for employment purposes that is supported by the government, and it became easier for beneficiaries of international protection to find jobs as well (Budai, 2021).

There are however many challenges migrants face, such as the lack of Hungarian knowledge, the lack of information, as employers are not aware of the conditions how they could employ migrants, and migrants are not aware of the legislation as well. To tackle these difficulties many projects were implanted by CSOs including language learning, training, social and legal counseling, and internship program initiatives. (Vadasi, 2019). The biggest challenge for beneficiaries of international protection is that they can't verify their education and qualification with any documents, but they are not allowed to contact their country as that would result in the termination of their status. Higher qualified people need to settle with lower-paying jobs in sectors where no qualification is needed, mainly in the tourism and hospitality and construction sectors. Difficulties in these sectors include that because of the low wages people tend to work more shifts so they do not have the time to train themselves, and that in the hospitality sector around 65% of the people are officially registered for minimum wages, or not for their real working hours. This is a problem for migrants aiming to gain Hungarian citizenship, as they can't meet the requirements to be employed full-time for 3 years and to prove that they have enough income to sustain themselves. COVID-19 brought an additional challenge, the hospitality sector was closed for around a year, and in 2020 between 20,000-40,000 Hungarians facing the same challenges came home from EU countries and became jobseekers in Hungary. The livelihood and meeting the requirements of Hungarian citizenship were risked for many migrants and beneficiaries of international protection (Budai, 2021).

Healthcare

Basic healthcare is provided covered by the refugee authority for asylum applicants. For beneficiaries of international protection healthcare is provided for 6 months after the recognition of their status, however they need to submit an application to enjoy this, that administrative burden is further complicated by the lack of Hungarian language knowledge. After 6 months beneficiaries of international protection enjoy the same rights as Hungarian citizens, they are entitled if they are "in need", contribute to the social security system by getting employed, or are minors or full-time students (Vadasi, 2018).

The current Public Health Strategy does not consider foreigners among patients, except for health tourism. One of the biggest challenges regarding healthcare is that no trainings have been provided and no protocol have been given for healthcare workers regarding how to deal with asylum-seekers or beneficiaries of international protection. When in 2015 around 400,000 asylum seekers were transiting the country, and around 117,000 were applying for asylum, only 30,000 people were provided health screening. This is problematic as refugees may have special health problems, no vaccinations, and mental health problems that require appropriate expertise, like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). There is no separate statistics for beneficiaries of international protection who use healthcare, so there is no data about their health status and their access to benefits.

Even though beneficiaries of international protection and migrants could access the Hungarian healthcare system if they are employed, they face many challenges. Hungarian healthcare staff generally do not speak foreign languages, while migrants do not speak Hungarian, hence they face difficulties expressing their health problems. Refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection refrain from using the public health system, even if they know they are entitled to benefits, because they fear that they are not legally employed by their employer or often they somehow do not have a social security number, which is the basis of all benefits (Tóth, 2021).

Education

Education is the area where Hungary received 0 points in the MIPEx index and in the NIEM ranking it achieved 87.5 for the legislation framework, but only 16.7 for policy framework and 0 for implementation and collaboration, hence it can be considered as the weakest area of integration. Regarding legislation, all children who legally reside in Hungary enjoy the same rights in the field of education regardless of their citizenship. The problem is though that there are no targeted programs in the national curriculums, or in the teachers training programs to facilitate the catching-up of foreign students, nor in their studies nor in Hungarian language learning (Bognár – Hetzer, 2021).

Since 2013, the public education system has been centralized and taken over from local authorities. There is no government program or funding to support the schools, there are no social orientation programs, language courses, or intercultural trainings for teachers, hence schools lack the resources to support the integration of foreign students. CSOs do an essential work in this field by providing free Hungarian courses and individual mentorship programs to facilitate the access of migrant children to the public education system. (Vadasi, 2018).

Regarding refugee children, already when they apply for asylum, they have a right to access education and when their status is granted, they are obliged to attend public education until they turn 16. In practice however at the Refugee Accommodation Centers access to education is limited, and when it happens it is mainly traveling teachers who help in language learning for children, but this kind of education is not officially recognized in the Hungarian Public Education system. Because of the lack of Hungarian language knowledge foreigner students face difficulties, moreover many of the beneficiaries of international protection can't read or write in latin letters that makes children's integration further complicated.

Despite the lack of policy regulations, some schools and civil society and church-based organizations created successful practices together. These good practices can be found at neighborhoods more densely populated with migrant pupils and in schools where bilingual teaching is provided. To tackle the lack of support and resources, schools rely on their own knowledge and experience that they gained from projects, but these projects are often not sustainable. These programs concentrate on Hungarian as a foreign language education supplemented with social work and teacher training, however less focused on creating an inclusive hosting society by increasing the other pupils and the parents' social consciousness. In schools where there are very few migrant kids, teachers mainly use cold integration as a strategy as they have no training or resources, hoping that the "knowledge will stick to the migrant kids like to other kids". This strategy can be sometimes successful, also it is possible that the certain teachers develop instinctively a strategy how to facilitate the integration of the migrant pupil, but there is a big risk that the problems of the migrant kids just stay latent (Bognár – Hetzer, 2021).

It is important to elaborate on higher education as well, as a large proportion of the migrants arrive to Hungary for study purposes. In 2018, 12.6% of the students in the Hungarian higher education were foreign citizens, while in 2008 foreign students represented only 4.4% of the total number of students. In the 2018/19 school year, 54% of the foreign students were third country nationals. (Faludy – Lakatos, 2021) This rapidly increasing number of TNC students is supported by scholarships from the Hungarian government, for instance in 2018/19, 9,035 TCNs studied in Hungary with the Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship, the largest number of students were from Jordan and Syria (Tempus Public Foundation, 2020).

If we consider beneficiaries of international protection who did not arrive to the country for study purpose, we can see a different picture. If the beneficiaries of international protection do not have the certificate about secondary school, there is no exact protocol about the application procedure, it is left to the decision-maker. The lack of Hungarian language and no support in secondary school makes it difficult to get into university, and beneficiaries of international protection have to compete with Hungarian students while receiving no support. Furthermore, a problem is the lack of knowledge by the university workers, and structural barriers.

A great example for this that for instance a Syrian student is studying at a university with a scholarship from the Hungarian government as he/she considered as foreigner, while a Syrian refugee in Hungary is not entitled to this scholarship because of his/her refugee status, but can also not get the social scholarship to which Hungarians are entitled because he/she is not allowed to contact his/her country of origin to ask for documents that are required to prove that he/she is in a disadvantaged social situation (Faludy – Lakatos, 2021).

As a great initiative to tackle these disadvantages on the premises of the Central European University, a weekend program called OLIVE was established to create a safe and inclusive learning space within a university setting for people who have experienced displacement, including asylum seekers and those with refugee status.
7

2. Conventional participation of migrants in Hungary

2.1. Political participation of migrants at the national level

According to the XXIII article of the Fundamental Law of Hungary, only Hungarian citizens are eligible to vote or to be voted in the National Elections.

Based on the European Commission (n.a.)'s definition migratory background can entail a person who "(a) migrated into their present country of residence; (b) previously had a different nationality from their present country of residence; (c) at least one of their parents previously entered their present country of residence as a migrant." In contrast to other European countries, in Hungary statistical data is available on the number and characteristics of foreigner residents (a), and some data on newly naturalized residents (b), but almost no separate data is available on second-generation migrants (c). This is especially true for political participation, as people from category (a) are not eligible to vote, hence only their intent could be assessed, and people from categories (b) and (c) are Hungarian citizens, so they are not indicated separately in the voting statistics.⁸

The only possible way to access political participation is through surveys. In 2011 an Immigrant Citizen Survey was conducted in 15 European cities including 1201 respondents from Budapest involving first-generation TCN migrants who had been legally residing in the country for at least a year. In 2008 a similar survey, the cross-national European Values Survey was conducted where similar data to the whole Hungarian population was collected. One of the main groups of questions was in connection to political and civic participation.

In the 2011 survey, 4.5% of the surveyed migrant population said they belong to a trade union, while in the 2008 survey 3.7%. To compare this to the Hungarian population, there is no data for 2011 but in 2015 9%, while in 2020 7.4% of the population belonged to trade unions. Moreover, in the 2011 survey 2,2%, while in the 2008 survey 0,6% of the respondents said they are part of a political organization (Huddleston, Tjaden, 2012). To assess voting in national elections, 63% of the respondents in 2011 said they would vote the next they if they were allowed to, and in 2008 more than 80% of the respondents said yes to the same question (Huddleston, Tjaden, 2012). The percentage of the migrant population who would intend to vote is comparable to the total population of Hungary, as in 2006 67.83%, in 2010 64.38%, in 2014 61.84% in 2018 70.22% of the eligible voters participated in the national elections (National Election Office, 2022). Another older survey observed that in 2006 most of the migrants did not have voting rights, but amongst the ones who had, two-thirds of the ethnic Hungarian immigrants, around half of the Arabs, but very few of the Turkish and Chinese migrants voted. The reason behind this was that many of the Chinese migrants wanted to receive their Hungarian citizenship to be able to move freely in Europe (Örkény – Székely, 2013).

⁷ More information can be found at: <https://openeducation.group/>

⁸ Voting statistics in Hungary include different demographic data like gender, age group, education, or employment status, but not the (previous) nationality.

It is important to highlight that these surveys were all conducted before the 2015 refugee crisis and before the topic of migration started to become highly politicized in the country, as well as before the political participation of all the citizens started to increase. An interview with a refugee revealed that the main reason why he wants to get Hungarian citizenship is that he would like to vote in national elections to have a chance to influence politics, emphasizing that he loves Hungary and the people here, but he feels that there are serious problems with the politics. He highlighted that he always votes in the local government elections because he has the right to do it and he finds it important to participate in the public life of the country (Mustafa, interview, 24 March 2022).

Although this is an attitude that could be expected due to the anti-immigrant politics of the government, another interview with the president of the Subjective Values Foundation highlighted that based on their experiences with migrant communities, especially with diaspora communities, they are not too active politically, and many times have strong bonds as an ethnic community in Hungary, so they feel nostalgic towards their country and thanks to their patriotic feelings they can identify themselves better with a right-wing nationalist party. New surveys would be needed to assess the political participation of people with a migratory background, both those who have and don't have yet citizenship (Lőrincz Marcell, interview, 25 March 2022).

2.2. Political participation of migrants at the local level

According to the XXIII article of the Fundamental Law of Hungary, adult people recognized as a refugee, immigrant or resident in Hungary have the right to vote, while adult citizens of another Member State of the European Union with a domicile in Hungary also have the right to be voted on the election of the local government and referendums. As of 26 March 2022, besides the 7,760,000 Hungarian citizens who have a Hungarian address, 131,014 EU citizens with a Hungarian address, and 31,578 immigrants, settled or refugees would have the right to vote at the local government elections, if it happened in the examined day, meaning that in total 2% of the voters would be non-Hungarian citizens, and 0.4% would be TCNs. In the 2019 local government elections 48.58% of the total eligible population voted, however, there is no available data on the National Election Office site separately about the percentage of the non-Hungarian citizens who voted (National Election Office, 2022).

3. Non-conventional participation of migrants in Hungary

Regarding migrants' non-conventional participation two important phenomena should be highlighted in Hungary. First is that the majority of the institutionalized organizations that engage in refugee or migrant assistance are run by Hungarian citizens. The second is that immigrants tend to be entrepreneurial, but their participation in NGOs is lower than the locals' (Gerő, 2021). In 2011 the Immigrant Citizen Survey found that 27% of the respondents said they know about immigrant NGOs and 6% responded that they are members of an immigrant or ethnic organization (Huddleston Thomas, Tjaden, 2012). Furthermore, the available literature focuses on Hungarian NGOs assisting migrants and refugees, or on organizations with a migrant background, but not much on the civic or political participation of migrants (Gerő, 2021). Consequently, the former two aspects will be better detailed in this chapter as well.

3.1. Migrant organizations

The most comprehensive study on migrant organizations was conducted by Kováts (2012) which identified 146 working migrant organizations⁹ in Hungary, more than 70% of them operating in Budapest. Migrant organizations were defined as more than 50% of their members having a migratory background.¹⁰ The 74 bigger migrant organizations were also further surveyed. Most of the examined migrant organizations had an East-Asian (31%), Middle Eastern (29%), African (22%), or European (24%) background. There were 7 Armenian, Syrian, and Vietnamese, 9 Turkish and Nigerian, 13 Russian, 27 Chinese, and 22 multiethnic organizations.¹¹ 53% of the examined organizations operated as an association, 22% as a foundation, and 11% as a church or religious organization.

Their fields of activity were also assessed which can be seen in table 4. Cultural activities are the most common, 89% of the respondents organized cultural programs, 72% community building as well, and around 40% of the organizations also indicated cultural activities as their main operating area. Education (65%) and the situation of the children and youth (60%) are also popular fields of activity, while housing (10%), healthcare (15%), and employment and training (22%) are less common. Only 16% of the respondents mentioned that politics are one of their fields of activity, however, some organizations also consider it as their main activity. Many organizations refuse to engage in any political activity as they intend to remain neutral by only organizing cultural activities, however, there are some considering political activism as their mission to raise awareness on certain topics. Finally, it is important to highlight that only one organization indicated that its main field of operation is immigration and none that it is the problems of the ethnic group that is represented by the organization. These last-mentioned fields represented the operational context of the organizations rather than their main objectives.

Field of activity	%
Cultural programs	89%
Community building	72%
Education	65%
Situation of children and youth	60%
Charity, fundraising	57%
International cooperation	54%
Problems of the represented ethnic group	53%
Human rights	45%
Topics regarding migration	45%
Sport	43%
Childcare or other services connected to children	35%
Business relations	32%
Issues of the local community or neighborhood	31%
Research	30%
Fight against discrimination	28%
Religious activity	27%
Humanitarian assistant to other countries	27%
Situation of women	27%
Employment and trainings	22%
Politics	16%
Healthcare	15%
Housing	14%
Criminal matters	12%
Situation of people living with disabilities	11%
Situation of older and retired people	10%
Other	10%
Consumer interests	5%
Protection of families	5%

Table 4: Fields of activities of migrant organizations based on a study conducted in 2012
Source: Kováts (2012)

⁹ Organization was defined as a civil initiative that has a structured, and institutionalized way of working, that can entail formalized and non-formalized civil society and church-based organizations as well.

¹⁰ The definition of migratory background was partly in line with the European Commission (n.a.)'s definition, meaning that a person or at least one of their parents were born in a third country, not counting European Union citizens as migrants.

¹¹ Multiethnic could mean multicultural organizations, organizations that are not explicitly organized based on ethnicity (religious organizations are part of this), or organizations representing a region (like Africans, Andeans)

74% of the organizations appeared in the written press, 64% wrote at least one letter to the authorities, 59% were featured on TV or radio, 53% released newsletters or flyers. The most activism was observed at organizations with an African or Middle Eastern background, while the least amongst the organizations with an East Asian background. Regarding vertical connections averagely migrant organizations were in connection with 5.5 institutions and political parties, however, some organizations reported that they faced difficulties when they wanted to get in contact with the local authorities or the public administration. Regarding horizontal connections, it is important to emphasize that bridging relationships between migrant organizations from different ethnic groups are not common, also migrant organizations do not have too many connections with other civil society organizations from the majority population, 31% reported no connection at all.

The study concluded that there are a lot more migrant organizations than was assumed by the migration-policy actors, however, most of these organizations did not define themselves as an organization dealing with migration, which is more common for the Hungarian organizations that work on a project-base to support integration. The migrant organizations are integrated mainly into the cultural or economic sector, but their presence eventually strengthens social cohesion (Kováts, 2012). Generally, still, organizations with a migrant background in Hungary are mainly created on a cultural-ethnic basis to do cultural activities, not for advocacy or political purposes. Civic participation appears to be typically low among migrants, but participation may be higher for people who no longer have a refugee status and have been living in Hungary for a longer period to maintain their traditions by doing cultural activities (Gerő, 2021).

A recent interview confirmed some of these findings, as even in 2022 the most common and well-organized organizations are the diaspora ones. A good example of this is the Vietnamese diaspora association, which organizes a lot of cultural programs and is well-organized and big as a community, however, they do not want to be visible and participate in politics at all. There are other smaller diasporas as well, like the Azerbaijani or Turk. On many occasions, these diasporas include students who after their studies might settle in Hungary, in which these diaspora associations have a role by providing help, cultural programs, and orientation. Other bigger diaspora communities include Chinese, Turkish who also have a Turkish Cultural Institute, and Arab and Sub-Saharan African communities, which are less organized and tight. The more politically active groups are the ones who are also recognized as a national minority and often have dual citizenship and are able to delegate advocates even for the Parliament. Ukrainians, Serbians, and other Balkan groups are like that. There are also EU member communities, however, they are also less active, because they do not meet that many obstacles in Hungary (Lőrincz Marcell, interview, 25 March 2022).

Religion can be a more cohesive force that creates communities besides ethnicity. For instance, the Ethiopian community that has around 50-100 members stick together based on their shared Copt Christian identity (Lőrincz Marcell, interview, 25 March 2022). Regarding the Muslim community mosques bring people together, for instance, there is a big one in the 11th district of Budapest, where Hungarians and foreigners come together to meet new people and celebrate holidays like Ramadan together, and there are smaller ones, where it is more common that people from the same country or region such as Afghans or North Africans come together to meet and help each other. On the other hand, it is common for migrants not to attend mosques to avoid meeting with people whom they had to flee from (Reza Sayed, interview, 24 March 2022).

These ethnic and religious communities or associations become more active and start to represent themselves when they face some issues that needed to be solved. Examples of that are when the Chinese community gets active when a regulation affects their businesses or restaurants, or when a religious group does advocacy that serves their interest (Lőrincz Marcell, interview, 25 March 2022). Solidarity is also an important aspect of how migrants organize and help themselves. Finding housing and employment are many times possible with the help of the migrant community, such as refugee entrepreneurs offering jobs for refugees, the housing of migrants being shared with other migrants, newcomers being involved in already existing migrant communities (Pósfai – Szabó, 2021).

3.2. Migrants' participation in CSOs

It is important to emphasize again that civil society organizations (CSOs) act as a bridge between migrant communities and the government, hence it is essential to provide a brief overview of them as well, while also detailing the participation of migrants in these organizations where it is relevant.

With the lead of UNHCR, a referral mechanism for asylum-seekers, refugees, stateless persons, and other vulnerable migrants was created where the below organizations were listed to turn to with regards to different areas, such as community and leisure events, housing, education, language learning, legal aid, livelihood support, mental health care.

Artemisszió Foundation, Baptist Integration Centre, Cordelia Foundation for the Rehabilitation of Torture Victims, Háttér Society Association, Hungarian Helsinki Committee, International Organization for Migration, Jesuit Refugee Service, Kalunba Charity, Lutheran Diakonia, Menedék Hungarian Association for Migrants, NANE Association, Next Step Association, Oltalom Charity Foundation, Patent Association, She 4 She Association.

Table 5: List of CSOs assisting refugees, migrants, and stateless persons in Hungary
Source: based on an UNHCR report

The above list covers quite well the CSOs dealing with refugees and migrants in Hungary. We can see that not so many CSOs operate in this field, most of them engage in other diverse activities as well, like supporting other disadvantaged groups. Furthermore, most of them are run by Hungarians, not the migrant communities themselves.

Next Step Hungary Association needs to be highlighted as the only refugee-led NGO that supports the integration of migrants in Hungary. The organization was established by a refugee from Africa and offers over 100 places per year in training courses and workshops and has reached over 3000 people since its establishment in 2009, their main target group is third-country nationals, but also involves other disadvantaged groups. Amongst the main activities of the organization are job market skills training, language learning, community building, children's program, education information session, legal information, and consulting sessions (Next Step Association, 2022).

Another organization with a migratory background is She4she, the Hungarian Migrant Women's Association. It was established by an Afghan woman to fight for equality for women without discrimination based on ethnicity, race, religion, belief, or any other category. They also do community building activities and hold training and different workshops (She 4 She Association, 2021).

Organizations with a purely migratory background are rare, but it is common that some of the migrant clients start to take part in the operation of the organization. There are other organizations with refugee or migrant employees as well, like the Kalunba Charity, Mandák House operated by the Lutheran Diakonia, Artemisszió Foundation, but new detailed research would be needed to assess the participation of migrants in these CSOs, and to examine again the migrant organizations after 10 years and assess their civic and political participation.

Finally, it is important to mention that there was an independent and informal group, called MigSzol that was established by Afghan refugees and consisted of refugees, migrants, and Hungarians aiming to fight for the rights of refugees, migrants, and asylum-seekers and their participation in the Hungarian politics and society. All their members were involved voluntarily and were not operating as a formal NGO. Their main aim was to raise awareness, create solidarity, and most importantly encourage the participation of migrants in political and civic life (MigSzol Csoport, n.a.). Eventually, the hostile political situation in Hungary resulted in that Migszol terminated their activities as they were scared that their members, especially refugees would lose their statuses if they engage in political actions and the illegal support of asylum-seekers, which got criminalized in Hungary (Gerő, 2021).

Finally, it is important to mention barriers to civic or political participation of migrants in the Hungarian context. Many migrants, especially refugees consider Hungary as a transit country, so they do not want to invest in something for the short term. Migszol for instance was established because its founders were planning to stay in Hungary. Also, an embedded hierarchical relationship between the helper and the assisted can hinder participation. Another barrier is that there are reactive public policies from the government on those who wish to participate, like a restriction on a travel allowance for asylum seekers after a protest. Finally, as already mentioned, the hostile political situation of Hungary prevents migrants to engage in any political or civic activity. On the other hand, interviews with civil society members revealed that active participation has advantages as well, as it can result in connections, knowledge of the political and legal system, more confidence, and political and civic participation can change the relationship, and refugees and members of the host society can become equal partners (Gerő, 2021).

4. Migrant's participation on the local municipality level

The Migration Strategy emphasizes the involvement of beneficiaries of international protection in decision-making by creating an Integration Forum, where they and their advocacy groups can also express their opinion and connect them to governmental and non-governmental actors responsible for integration (Migration Strategy, 2013). This Forum however has not been established since, hence there have not been any consultative bodies implemented on a national level where migrants would be able to participate (Gerő, 2021).

The situation regarding the involvement and participation of migrants is more favorable at the local municipalities' level. In 2012 the Municipality of Budapest submitted a project to set up a „migration roundtable”. The project was implemented between 2013 and 2014 with a goal to better involve local authorities in the integration of migrants as this issue was mainly the responsibility of the civil society and the state. On one hand, the goal of the migration roundtable was to create a forum to get to know the needs of migrant communities living in Budapest, and on the other hand to inform them about their possible ways of participation. Policy recommendations on different areas of integration were created as a result of the roundtables (Budapest Főváros Önkormányzata, n.a.).

From 2016 to 2018 a similar project was implemented by the Subjective Values Foundation to set up a migration roundtable, financed by the then available AMIF funds. Besides the capacity building and training of migrants and migrant organizations, 10 consultative roundtables were set up with public authorities to provide feedback to policymakers and public administrators on how public services in Hungary can become more inclusive (Subjective Values Foundation, 2017). Because of the approaching elections, these roundtables were implemented but did not get visibility. An important thing that was observed during these roundtables is that there are key actors, who are more active and represent the whole community or organization, but their substitution is not solved, and there is no fluctuation and rotation in the organizations (Lőrincz, interview, 25 March 2022).

In 2019 the opposition won the local elections in several districts of Budapest, including the Mayor role of Budapest, that resulted in a more supportive and open attitude towards civil society organizations and migrants, but a lack of funding from the government. A more supportive environment includes initiatives by the 8th district aiming to foster integration of migrants into social and civic life. An example is a collaboration with Menedék - Hungarian Association for Migrants to organize bicycle classes for refugee women. Another great example is an exhibition of paintings made by refugees that was held at the 8th district's Mayor's Office together with She4she, an association of migrant women living in Hungary and the Hungarian Helsinki Committee (josefvaros.hu, n.a.). What is important to highlight that these positive initiatives got visibility as well. Posters with the invitation for the exhibition were hung on the official Infopoints of 8th district, and the webpage and Facebook page of the municipality of the 8th district shared articles about these events. Introducing a positive narrative and creating these kinds of initiatives to involve refugees in the neighborhood is an important step considering the previous negative attitude of the district and the hostile official narrative of the government.

5. Conclusion

Hungary is in a very controversial position regarding the integration of migration and their opportunities of civic and political participation. Historically Hungary has been considered a net sending rather than a receiving country, however from 1990 started to attract more and more migrants especially from the neighboring countries, as well as some from other countries, like China. In 2015 large number of asylum-seekers entered Hungary, however considered the country as a transit country towards the wealthier Western European countries. Since 2015 Hungary accepted only a bit more than 1000 beneficiaries of international protection but doubled the number of migrants for economic and study purposes, in total foreigners represent around 2% of the total population.

From 2015, the Hungarian government started to have an anti-immigration narrative and launched campaigns against illegal migration, mainly targeting refugees. This campaign has been ongoing since, and was especially intense during the 2018 elections, when posters campaigns created fear, hatred, and xenophobia amongst the Hungarian population. As a result of these, despite the low number of migrants, especially refugees living in Hungary, the Hungarian population is still very rejecting against migrants and see them as a big threat in the EU.

Thanks to the low number of migrants and the anti-immigration narrative even though if we consider laws and rights Hungary are quite progressive in terms of migration, the situation regarding integration policies and especially implementation of integration services are very unfavorable. In 2013, a Migration Strategy was released for the period of 2014 to 2020 to create a guideline for the country's actions for the integration of migrants into the Hungarian society, however the promised integration policy has not been created or implemented since then. Currently there is no integration policy and no integration services provided, including no supported Hungarian language education, and no trainings for policy-makers, public administrators, teachers, social workers, healthcare workers, employers or anyone who are in contact with migrants, hence migrants are responsible for their own integration.

Political and civic participation is quite low in Hungary amongst the migrant population. There have been no initiatives to involve migrants in decision-making for instance by creating consultative bodies on the national level. On the local level the last initiative was created in 2012, but fortunately local governments in Budapest are getting more open towards migrants in contrast to the national attitude.

It is important to mention here the recent developments of the Ukrainian war. As of 1 April 2022, 379,988 refugees fleeing the Ukrainian war have arrived in Hungary (UNHCR, 2022). Ukrainian citizens and beneficiaries of international protection in Ukraine can apply for a temporary protection status to access free education, healthcare, and employment. As the conflict is ongoing there is no data yet about the number of people enjoying temporary protection fleeing the Ukrainian war (Hungarian Helsinki Committee, 2022). Most of the people fleeing Ukraine are continuing their way to Western Europe or other countries where they have family, but some of them are staying in Hungary. Solidarity from the Hungarian population has been very high, and there has been a lot of cooperation and civil help. Problems regarding the integration of Ukrainian refugees, and the lack of integration policies have already started to come to light, such as how can pupils get integrated to school if they do not speak Hungarian.

We are living in a moment when the integration system of Hungary shows its weaknesses. However, these times can also be an opportunity to discuss these issues and find solutions with targeted policies on the different areas of integration, so that equality does not only exist on paper but in practice as well, and migrants can have a chance to actively participate in the creation and implementation of integration policies.

Annex

The biggest limitation regarding finding data about migration in the Hungarian context is that thanks to the anti-immigration narrative and the lack of integration policies and strategy, knowledge about the situation on the integration of migrants in Hungary started to disappear in the public sector and at the same time in the civil sector as well due to the lack of funding.

Despite the low number of refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection in Hungary, this paper detailed more extensively their integration and participation rather than migrants staying in Hungary for other more popular purposes such as employment or education. The reason behind this decision is that there is less information on migrants in general, but more recent research, thanks to the NIEM analyses by Menedék – the Hungarian Association for Migrants, on the integration of beneficiaries of international protection in Hungary. Having no integration policy and procedure for them also means that there is no support regarding the integration of any migrants, even though many of them arrived at Hungary with the support of the government. The negative narrative against “illegal migration” and foreigners in general and the lack of integration policies and support result in the fact that even these welcomed groups could face difficulties in integration, discrimination and are discouraged to participate in the public life of Hungary (Gerő, 2021).

Beneficiaries of international protection do not appear specifically in the data collection, for instance because they do not need specific permit to access the labor market or education. Furthermore, the number of beneficiaries of international protection is very low in Hungary, representing around 0.05% of the total population, hence they are also invisible to data collection. These result in the fact that there is no data regarding the successful or unsuccessful integration of beneficiaries of international protection on the different fields of integration. Consequently, there are no targeted policies for integration, and even if there intended to be, there would be no reliable data on which integration policies could be built. The low number of asylum-seekers and the shrinking space of asylum results in a vicious circle that there are no specific tools to support integration and beneficiaries of integration protection are discouraged to stay in Hungary because of the lack of these measures (Vadasi, 2018).

The lack of data hinders the analysis of migrants’ conventional participation in Hungary. There is some statistical data on the number of foreigners staying in Hungary, however, they are not allowed to vote on national elections. Beneficiaries of international protection and migrants with permanent residence permits are allowed to vote in the local government elections, but there is no separate data on their participation. There is no available data regarding most of other issues for naturalized people and second-generation migrants as they are treated as Hungarian citizens in the statistics¹², hence their participation could only be assessed by surveys.

The latest survey about political participation was done in 2011, and the last comprehensive study on migrant organizations was done in 2012. All these surveys were conducted before 2015 when the number of migrants started to increase, and when the public narrative started to become very negative towards migration. Organizations with a migrant background in Hungary are mainly created on a cultural-ethnic basis to do cultural activities, not for advocacy or political purposes, but there is no information on the reasons behind this phenomenon, and on the barriers to civic or political participation of migrants in Hungary (Gerő, 2021).

¹² As an exception, within the scope of the last labor force survey done in 2014 by the Central Statistical Office, an additional Labor market situation of first- and second-generation migrants survey was conducted. The limitation of this survey however is that many of the included people are ethnic Hungarians, hence it concludes things like the lack of Hungarian language knowledge is not a problem for migrants, and does not detail non-Ethnic Hungarian migrants separately. https://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xftp/stattukor/migrans_mpiaci_helyzete.pdf

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