

# The Social Aspects of the 2015 Migration Crisis in Hungary

## A new report by Tarki Social Research Institute

### Press release

In 2015 approximately 390 thousand migrants — of which 177 000 were registered as asylum seekers — crossed the Hungarian border. In the summer of 2015, thousands of Hungarian volunteers organised themselves to help the asylum-seekers entering the country. The recently published report “The social aspects of the refugee crisis in Hungary” by Tarki Social research Institute provides an analysis of attitudes of the majority towards migrants and refugees, while also focusing on dynamics of the formation of various grassroots and helping organizations.

Most importantly, the report

- explores changes in the majority’s attitudes towards migrants (with a special focus on asylum seekers), based on two waves of data collections (October 2015 and January 2016) on representative samples;
- analyses the development and the role of the organisations working in the field. The focus is placed on those – mostly non-governmental– organisations that have been taking an active role in helping asylum-seekers in Hungary.

The analysis is based representative surveys carried in Europe (Eurobarometers) in Hungary (by Tarki in October 2015 and January 2016) and in Visegrad countries (by CEORG partners between August and October 2015). In addition, stakeholder interviews, focus groups with volunteers of grass root organizations and a focused analysis of online and social media provided the base for qualitative assessments of civil society reactions.

Major findings related to attitudes are as follows:

Most of the EU population (85%) agreed that “additional measures should be taken to fight illegal immigration of people from outside the EU” and three fourth of them would also support “a common European policy on migration”. Hungary was one of those countries (next to Denmark and Estonia) a higher proportion of whose population supported additional measures to fight illegal migration than the EU average, and a lower proportion of whose population agreed with the concept of a common migration policy than the EU average.

Fear ridden welfare chauvinism (a concept by which welfare benefits should be restricted to certain groups, particularly to the natives of a country, as opposed to immigrants.) is prevalent in Hungary, strongly related to scapegoating. Fears regarding immigration can be explained by the same social and demographic variables (level of

education, region of residence, age) as those explaining xenophobia; the main difference is in the explanatory power of age and party preference.

Xenophobia (a phenomenon measured since 1992 by TÁRKI) and xenophilia fluctuated over the year of 2015 but in January 2016 the level of xenophobia reached an all time high while xenophilia practically disappeared. The overwhelming majority of the “thinkers” (respondents who would need for more information before making their decision, and are inclined to evaluate the pros and the cons) would not allow any asylum seeking group to enter Hungary, with the exception of ethnic Hungarians from Ukraine.

When analysing possible reasons for flight (e. g. due to war or civil war, being persecuted on the grounds of religion or ethnicity etc.). we found similar relationships as in the cases of xenophobic attitudes, meaning that—out of the examined socio-demographic predictors—place of residence (both *type of settlement* as well as *region*), and party preference all play a significant role in welcoming attitudes (level of education had an effect only in the first wave, but neither gender or age had a statistically significant effect at all). However, those who met some kind of migrants (asylum seekers, refugees or migrants) in the past 12 months reject a significantly higher number of reasons than people who did not meet any.

Results with regards to the “law and order” type of Hungarian immigration policy, we found that the overwhelming majority of the respondents agree with the ideas of tightening the Hungarian asylum and immigration policy. The public support for the immigration policy formulated in the spirit of “law and order” is highly correlated with the perceived threats, both realistic (volume and irregularity) and symbolic (cultural and religious aspects). We have measured the perceived level of threat equally and extremely high both in the European and the Hungarian context, with levels of realistic threats somewhat higher than levels of symbolic threats.

The paper also analyses the development and the role of the organisations working in the field, with a special focus on the new grassroots (helping the migrants staying temporarily in Hungary), that used Facebook primarily for recruiting activists and organizing their activities. The major findings are as follows:

The main new grassroots are based in Budapest, along with relevant grassroots in some other large cities. These grassroots played a major role in the refugee crisis, and are based on volunteer members and donations from Hungarian – and later foreign – citizens and companies. They grew up rapidly from early summer and thus the organizational development was a major challenge for all of them.

The activity of these grassroots were often questioned in terms of professionalism, while other NGOs and in particular the larger charities were often claimed to be poorly involved in the aid work, especially in the first half of the crisis, although many NGOs

directly or indirectly linked to the migrants in their original mission were definitely active, in some cases over their capacities.

The aid work of the grassroots was solely based on the solidarity of volunteers, and many of them are continuing the relief work both at domestic and at international level targeting the asylum-seekers and local vulnerable groups as well. The number of activists has decreased significantly, but the core teams are still in the frontline when relief work is needed.

The focus group discussions and interviews with volunteers working in the field revealed that most of them had no prior experience as a volunteer the crisis might have had a strong mobilizing effect. Three main motivational structures have been identified: those with primarily altruistic motivations, those, who were mainly driven by outrage about the political situation, and lastly the first or second generation immigrants and their relatives who felt they had to get involved. In terms of political motivation, which has been usually attributed to the volunteers as the primary driver of their activity, the analysis found that individuals in all three motivational structures identified themselves as volunteers, and denied the importance of their political motivations, considering the aid work as the most important aspect of their activity.

The focused online media analysis was aimed to present how the various types of aid organizations as well how they used the media during the migration crisis. Despite the intense media attention to the migration crisis for several months generating hundred thousands of articles, in only a small fraction the aid organizations appeared; biggest coverage in terms of the number of articles was published by independent online media sites like 444.hu, origo.hu and index.hu. Volunteers and refugees were frequently interviewed but mostly by independent or opposition media outlets index.hu, hvg.hu or origo.hu and never by the pro-Government public media such as hirado.hu or the right-wing magyarhirlap.hu. The most successful agenda-setters among the NGOs and grassroots were Migration Aid (with its humanitarian framework) and the Helsinki Committee. Charity organisations were often mentioned together in a governmental and/or critical framework (condemning them for being passive during some periods of the crisis).

Social media activity during the migration crisis has shown that predominantly Facebook was used in the forming and organization of the new grassroots providing relief to migrants. Analysing the most influential groups' activity, it is clear, that the larger groups receive more attention due to their size, while the smaller a group the more active their members are.

For more on the report, please visit

[http://www.tarki.hu/hu/news/2016/kitekint/20160330\\_refugees.pdf](http://www.tarki.hu/hu/news/2016/kitekint/20160330_refugees.pdf)

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