IV. The Reception of Refugees and the Reactions of the Local Population in Hungary

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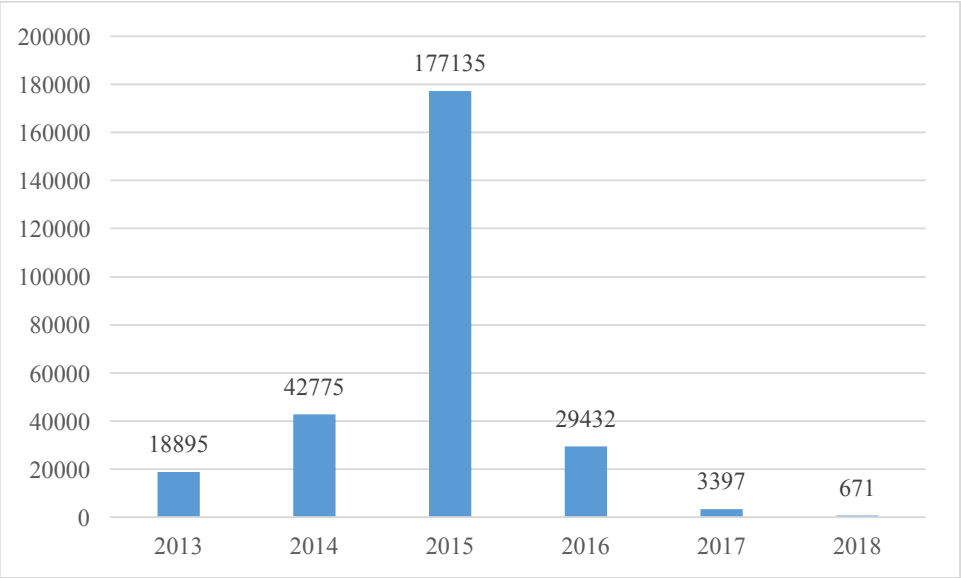
1. The Reception Crisis Years

The summer of 2015 has been perceived as a turning point in Hungary's asylum and migration history, and to some extent in the history of the country's domestic and foreign policy. The refugee reception crisis of 2015 brought forth several political actions that since then have become symbolic reference points for policy and for professional actors in the field of asylum and migration, as well as for politicians and the general public in Hungary and abroad. The most remarkable ones were: the Hungarian government's billboard campaign against immigrants and immigration; the mobilization in civil society to help people stranded at railway stations and in public parks in the late summer of 2015; the setting up of the border fence along the Serbian and Croatian border and the subsequent closure of the green border; the government's refusal of the European Emergency Relocation Mechanism and the related communication campaign and public referendum. Although there have been several other legal and political developments since these events, this chapter mainly focuses on the period between January 2015 and October 2016. This period is bookended by two events, both of symbolic importance: the starting point was the Hungarian Prime Minister's public speech following the Charlie Hebdo incident, and the period ended with the public referendum on the so-called 'relocation quota' on 2 October 2016. The reason for not – or only partially – extending the analysis beyond that point is that the interaction between the government and civil society has since then largely shifted away from the developments around the reception crisis. This is because by the end of 2016, asylum seekers and refugees were no longer present in Hungary in large numbers.

1.1. Asylum statistics of the preceding years

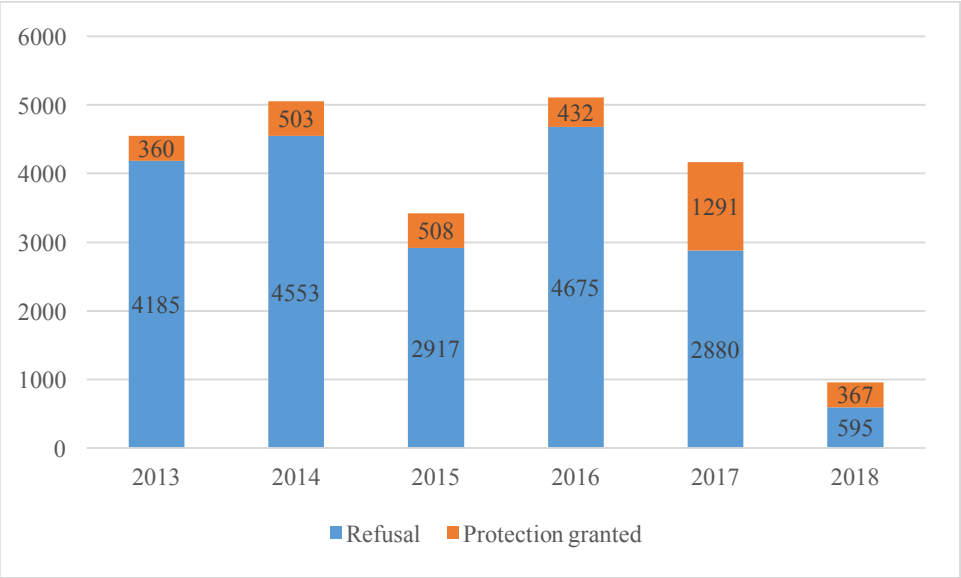
The year 2015 showed a dramatic increase in the number of asylum seekers in Hungary. It reached an unprecedented peak of over 177,000 asylum applications registered (see Figure 5.1), and the number only stopped growing because the asylum system collapsed at the end of August. There were 414,000 irregular border crossings registered in the same period. Roughly half of them occurred between 15 September and 16 October. As we will see later, the green borders with Serbia and Croatia were closed in that exact period.

Figure 5.1: Number of asylum seekers (2013–18).



The Hungarian asylum system has always been characterized by a strong presence of secondary movements. The majority of those registered have moved on and disappeared from the system even before the first decision regarding their status was made. As a result, the number of cases for which an asylum authority made an "in-merit decision" was much lower than the actual number of asylum seekers until 2017, when asylum seekers could no longer leave the transit zone unless they abandoned their case by travelling back across the border, or unless they received a positive decision. Thus, the number of decisions and the frequency of some form of international protection being granted in the first instance over the past six years are as shown in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2: Number of in-merit first instance decisions by the asylum authority (2013–18).



From looking at this figure, it is apparent that, despite the initial dramatic increase and the subsequent drop in the number of asylum seekers, the number of decisions remained more or less constant until 2018. Significantly, the year of the crisis produced considerably fewer decisions, most likely due to the systemic collapse and the subsequent organized transit of asylum seekers. The different patterns for 2017 and 2018 are explained by the introduction and gradual adjustment of the transit zones: in the first year they had a considerable effect on selection and containment, resulting in an unprecedented recognition rate, which was quickly adjusted in 2018 by further restrictive measures, resulting in a considerable drop in intake but an even higher recognition rate.

Regarding the composition of asylum seekers and people granted international protection, the three largest nationality groups are shown in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Countries of origin of the 3 largest groups of asylum seekers and people granted protection (2013–18).

Year	Asylum Seekers	Beneficiaries of International Protection
2013	Kosovo, Pakistan, Afghanistan	Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia
2014	Kosovo, Afghanistan, Syria	Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia
2015	Syria, Afghanistan, Kosovo	Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia
2016	Afghanistan, Syria, Pakistan	Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq
2017	Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria	Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq
2018	Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria	n.d.

1.2. Chronology of the refugee reception crisis from January 2015 to October 2016

On 11 January 2015, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán gave an interview to the Hungarian Public Television on the occasion of his participation in the march in Paris that paid tribute to the victims of the Charlie Hebdo incident. In the interview he made several statements that triggered strong responses from opposition political parties, the media and civil society organizations. Orbán said that Europe needs a more straightforward and honest discourse on migration, resulting in more restrictive immigration policies: "Economic immigration is a bad thing in Europe, we shouldn't look at it as if it had any use. It brings only trouble and danger to European people, therefore immigration should be stopped; this is the Hungarian position." He also mentioned that there were only a limited number of people in Hungary "whose cultural background was different from ours" who had no problems with integrating into Hungarian society. "But it needs to be clear", he said, "that we won't allow, at least while I am the Prime Minister and while we have this government, Hungary to become the target of immigrants." He

concluded that "we don't want a significant minority among us with different cultural features and backgrounds, we want to keep Hungary as Hungary".[1] Subsequently, the government made it clear that they identified a causal relationship between the terrorist attacks and unrestricted or loosely regulated immigration.

The number of asylum seekers from Kosovo had been rapidly increasing for the previous two years, reaching its peak in the early months of 2015. The ever-increasing irregular migration from Kosovo towards Western European countries had become a common discussion point for government officials and pro-government media, highlighting the problem of managing irregular immigration. The Prime Minister's calls for a more restrictive immigration policy also took place in the context of the growing number of Kosovars crossing the border irregularly, asking for asylum and eventually moving on to another European member state. On 11 February, the government announced that it would start a so-called public consultation on immigration,[2] and on 20 February the parliament held a plenary debate titled "Hungary doesn't need livelihood immigrants". Due to reinforced border controls on the Kosovo–Serbia and Serbia–Hungary borders, the number of asylum seekers from Kosovo dropped significantly.

In March and April, the number of asylum seekers from Kosovo remained low. However, asylum seekers from Syria and Afghanistan started to arrive in slowly but steadily increasing numbers. Although the numbers no longer justified urgency, the government moved forward with the preparation of a communication campaign on immigration, with the aim of introducing substantial restrictive amendments to the laws on asylum and immigration. One month later, the government started to send out questionnaires for the National Consultation on Immigration and Terrorism, a political consultation introduced by the second Orbán government aiming to ask people's opinion directly before crucial policy decisions, which was posted to every person over eighteen years with a registered address in Hungary. Over the years, these consultations became an effective tool in the government's communication strategy, and have regularly been used as evidence of the popular legitimacy of its position and decisions.[3] There have been eight such consultations to date; the one discussed here was the fifth. It consisted of twelve questions, all of them with severe methodological flaws: either being "leading" questions that suggested the expected answer, or setting false or incomplete dilemmas to choose from.[4] As a result, the responses were overwhelmingly in line with the government's message. The questions can be grouped around three main topics: drawing a connection between failed immigration policies and terrorism, expressing the need for stricter immigration policy and proposing alternatives to supporting immigration, such as tackling root causes in countries of origin and favouring child and family policy.[5]

In June, the government launched its first billboard campaign on migration, with the aim of endorsing the ongoing National Consultation. The billboard campaign consisted of three core messages addressed to immigrants, albeit in Hungarian. The messages were the following: "If

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[1] See the summary of the Prime Minister's speech: Kormány, *A gazdasági bevándorlást meg kell állítani* [Economic immigration must be stopped], 2015 (in Hungarian), <http://www.kormany.hu/hu/a-miniszterelnok/hirek/a-gazdasagi-bevandorlast-meg-kell-allitani>, accessed July 1, 2019.

[2] See the summary of the press conference: Kormány, *National consultation to be launched on illegal immigration*, 2015, <http://www.kormany.hu/en/prime-minister-s-office/news/national-consultation-to-be-launched-on-illegal-immigration>, accessed July 1, 2019.

[3] For the government's communications, see: About Hungary, *National Consultation*, <http://abouthungary.hu/national-consultation/>, accessed July 1, 2019. For a critical analysis, see: Nova (2017).

[4] Migration researchers and leading Hungarian social scientists protested against the consultation, calling for it to be revoked by the government.

[5] A few examples to illustrate the questions: "Some say that immigration, mishandled by Brussels, may be connected with the spread of terrorism. Do you agree with this?"; "Would you support the Hungarian government in applying stricter immigration rules in opposition to Brussels' lenient policies?"; "Do you agree with the Hungarian government that instead of immigration we need to support Hungarian families and the birth of Hungarian children?".

you come to Hungary, you must not take Hungarians' jobs"; "If you come to Hungary, you must obey our laws"; and "If you come to Hungary, you must respect our culture." The three messages encapsulated the main points of the government's framing of the threat posed by immigration, triggering a vigorous response from political and civil society movements. Several billboards were damaged or overwritten, and there was public fundraising for a counter-campaign organized by the Hungarian mock party the Two-Tailed Dog, which eventually resulted in placing hundreds of billboards with messages ridiculing, twisting or negating the messages of the original campaign (Nagy Zs. 2016).

According to a public opinion poll by Századvég, a pro-government think tank, the overwhelming majority of Hungarians were sympathetic to the messages of the billboards, and in two out of three cases, their political preferences did not have an impact on their support. Only in the case of the billboard hinting that immigrants might "take away jobs from Hungarians" was the public more divided: those with left-wing inclinations tended to refute that message.[6]

The number of asylum seekers arriving in Hungary via the Serbian border continued to grow dramatically in June. By the end of the month, the situation reached a stage where neither the Border Police nor the Asylum and Immigration Authority could contain the new arrivals in their designated holding places. Temporary (preliminary) detention for registration and identification could not last longer than forty-eight hours by law, and the temporary collection centres set up in the border zone quickly became overcrowded and eventually clogged. There was no organized transport available between the collection centres and the open or closed refugee reception centres intended for hosting asylum seekers for the duration of their asylum procedure. These centres were all full to their maximum possible capacity. Consequently, people were released after their registration by the authorities and asked to travel to the reception centre designated to them on their own. Most people, however, did not intend to stay in Hungary for long, so rather than trying to get to a reception centre, they headed for Budapest and eventually further on, to Germany or other Western European countries. As a consequence, asylum seekers started to appear in ever-larger numbers in public squares and parks around the three main railway stations in Budapest, as well as at the railway station in Szeged, a country town located near the Serbian border, where people spent their first day or two in detention before moving on. Indeed, Szeged was the first place where an informal volunteer group formed in early June to help people board trains that would take them to Budapest or elsewhere in Hungary. This initiative was soon followed by several other volunteer groups, active mostly in Budapest but also in other country towns that asylum seekers travelled through and where they had to change trains on their way to Budapest or to one of the open refugee reception centres.

The number of people stranded around railway stations kept growing during the summer months. By early September, there were over ten thousand people passing through each day or taking a few days to move on towards Western Europe. By the end of August, the registration system had collapsed, authorities were no longer registering people entering the country and asylum requests were filed only occasionally. In early September, the Hungarian government started to organize bus transfers from the Serbian border to permanent and temporary refugee reception centres near the Austrian border, from which people could easily move on. Throughout these months, the question of whether these people could freely move on from Hungary to Austria and eventually to Germany remained ambiguous and unresolved. Sometimes there were signs of free movement that resulted in thousands boarding trains, and yet there were also times when the Hungarian and Austrian police prevented people from

[6] See the report on the survey: Századvég, *Plakátháború – kinek van igaza* [Billboard war – who is right], 2015, <https://szazadveg.hu/hu/kutatasok/az-alapitvany-kutatasai/piackutatas-kozvelemeny-kutatas/plakathaboru-kinek-van-igaza>, accessed July 1, 2019.

boarding trains, even with a valid ticket. These circumstances led to chaotic situations with a lot of tension between the migrants, the volunteers and the authorities.

Most of the volunteer activities supporting asylum seekers travelling through Hungary took place during the summer months. Volunteering mostly focused on providing basic care and amenities to people stranded in and around railway stations and public spaces. More complex services emerged as well, including medical care, family tracing and providing accommodation and transport, as well as providing access to information and communication facilities. Several volunteer groups worked alongside each other, sometimes in a coordinated manner, sometimes in conflict and with rivalry among them. There were also individuals and families who became active in helping asylum seekers without joining one of the coordinated initiatives. Once the reception crisis in Hungary caught global media attention, volunteer groups from other European countries, most notably from Austria and Germany, started to arrive, and for the last two to three weeks before the closure of the Serbian border, international aid agencies set up their services as well. This often led to chaotic and uncoordinated situations, especially in the border zone where the Border Police was supposed to control the situation, but seemingly the area turned into a large informal refugee settlement.

Another source of conflict was the lack of coordination and mutual acknowledgement between the informal volunteer groups and the volunteers who worked under the auspices of the major Hungarian charity organizations. The government and state agencies (the police and the Office of Immigration and Nationality) played a clear political role in keeping this conflict alive by disregarding, belittling or even negating the contribution of the grassroots volunteer movements, solely relying on the help of major and established aid agencies, even in cases when these clearly had capacity problems.

Besides the extraordinary nature of the situation in general, this period was marked by three symbolic events that became points of reference for most actors in the field. On 27 August, seventy-two people were found dead in a truck in Austria, apparently being smuggled in from Hungary. On 4 September, thousands of people started marching from the Keleti Railway Station in Budapest toward the Austrian border, along the M1 Highway. After some hesitation, followed by lengthy negotiations, the government ordered the transportation by bus of 4500 people to the border. The third event was the closure of the Serbian border on 15 September and the subsequent violent clashes between the police and the migrants trying to enter Hungary. The border fence, built with the aim of stopping mass irregular immigration and channelling asylum seekers to designated entry points (the so-called Transit Zones), became the strongest symbol and point of reference in social and political debates related to the 2015 reception crisis in Hungary. In mid-June, the government decided to close the 175-km-long border with Serbia, and the parliament passed the necessary legal amendments in early July. Construction works followed, and by the end of August a temporary barbed-wire fence was placed along the border, which was gradually replaced with a more permanent fence. The closure of the border was heavily criticized by opposition political parties, international organizations and local NGOs, along with the increasingly vocal volunteer movements. On 15 September, the fence closed off the customary crossing points for irregular migrants and, alongside this, a package of legal amendments entered into force. The package concerned the law on the national border and the penal code, as well as the laws on the entry and residency of third country nationals and the law on asylum.

Although migrants were no longer arriving from Serbia due to the closure of the border, the flow of migration did not stop but rather diverted to the border with Croatia, where a similar border fence was being built, but with a considerable delay. The main difference from the previous period was that the state authorities organized and maintained a transit corridor along which they transported people arriving at crossing points on the Croatian border directly to border crossing points with Austria. Boarding trains and buses, over 200,000 people were

transported with the help of the police, the military and the national public transportation companies. As a result, migrants disappeared from railway stations and public places and most of the voluntary help became redundant. International volunteer groups quickly moved further south along the so-called "Balkans Route" in Serbia and Croatia. Hungarian groups tried to get involved in providing assistance to the diminishing number of people stranded on the Serbian side of the border fence, or supporting newcomers entering from Croatia or leaving for Austria after being transported to the border. Despite these efforts, in this period care and support to the migrants being transported were provided mostly by the large, established aid organizations (most notably the Hungarian Red Cross and the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta), as grassroots volunteer movements and individual civilians were not authorized to enter the areas of embarkation and disembarkation, which were declared special military and police operation zones. On 16 October, the green border with Croatia was closed as well, and asylum seekers could only enter through two transit zones or – if they had valid travel documents – through the regular border crossing points.

In November–December 2015, the reception crisis in Hungary was virtually over as far as one considers the mass transit of irregular migrants through the country. The migration route was diverted towards Croatia and Slovenia, the previously overcrowded refugee reception centres gradually emptied out and arrivals through the border transit zones remained low. Despite all this, the government's communication campaign did not recede: the two EU relocation schemes became its target. Hungary voted against the second (mandatory) scheme in the European Council and turned to the European Court of Justice, together with Slovakia, to try to annul the Council's decision. At the same time, the government initiated a referendum-like collection of signatories against the so-called "settlement quota". The November terrorist attacks in Paris and the fact that some of the perpetrators had come (or come back) to Europe as asylum seekers via the Balkans Route were used as strong elements in the government's communications on immigration and asylum.

The number of asylum seekers entering the transit zones along the Serbian border and submitting their claims upon entering Hungary irregularly started increasing again at the beginning of 2016. The number of people apprehended during or after crossing the border fence increased as well, indicating that the border fence and the legal measures protecting it were not sufficient to prevent people from entering the country. Continuing its communication campaign against European asylum and migration policies, the government initiated a public referendum on the EU relocation quota in February. The proposed date of the referendum was 2 October, and the government began its related communication campaign, which increasingly targeted the allegedly failed and mistaken immigration policy of "Brussels".[7]

The government launched its second billboard campaign in the following months, with a broader range of messages portraying immigration as an imminent threat to security and public order. The March terrorist attacks in Brussels again served as a strong point of reference, just as in the case of the incidents in Paris the previous year. The billboard campaign was accompanied with a detailed information campaign involving leaflets on the dangers of immigration, political rallies and public fora. The Two-Tailed Dog Party launched a counter-campaign and oppositional parties, together with several human rights and advocacy NGOs, actively campaigned for either boycotting the referendum or for casting an invalid vote, or even for casting a valid vote that opposed the government's point of view. The referendum itself was not strictly about the EU relocation mechanism, but rather on a more general question that only vaguely resembled the much-debated relocation mechanism. The question to vote on was the

[7] The meaning of "Brussels" in the government's political communication is inconsistent: sometimes it means the European Union, but sometimes it has a more restricted meaning referring to the European Commission only, or to an unspecified cosmopolitan bureaucratic elite working in and around European institutions.

following: “Do you want the European Union to be able to mandate the obligatory resettlement of non-Hungarian citizens into Hungary even without the approval of the Parliament?”.[8]
In the meantime, the parliament adopted new amendments to the laws on immigration and asylum as well as on the protection of national borders. As a result, asylum applications were to be submitted only in the transit zones along the border, and undocumented foreigners apprehended within 8 km of the border fence were to be escorted back to the other side of the fence. The transit zones had a limited reception capacity, causing the accumulation of hundreds of people on the Serbian side of the fence, which resulted in the emergence of informal refugee settlements. Volunteer groups started to operate in these settlements, often entering into conflict with the Hungarian or Serbian border authorities. The activities of paramilitary groups, especially from Ásotthalom, intensified and Hungarian and international NGOs started to criticize the police and the military for allegedly using disproportionate force and violence.[9]
On 2 October 2016, the referendum took place. Legally speaking, the referendum failed as the number of valid votes was below the minimally required 50 per cent of the total number of the population with voting rights. This result was mostly due to the low turnout, which could have equally been the result of a lack of interest or of the successful mobilization towards a boycott. Out of those who voted, the overwhelming majority voted in favour of the government’s position.[10]

1.3. Developments since October 2016

In March 2017, a new legislative package was adopted by the parliament that further tightened the asylum system, bringing forth its present characteristics. The so-called 8 km rule was extended, making it possible for the police to escort to the Serbian side of the border fence anyone apprehended anywhere in Hungary without valid entry or residence permits and documentation. The border transit zones became only places of residence for asylum seeker families with children, and other vulnerable people were no longer authorized to move into reception centres inside the country. The only exceptions were unaccompanied children under the age of fourteen. A constitutional amendment declared that asylum claims could only be dealt with if the claimant entered Hungary directly from a country where persecution had occurred or might occur.
Alongside the legal amendments, a new public consultation was launched with the title “Let’s stop Brussels”, asking the public about five threats stemming from EU policies. One dealt with the dangers of losing sovereignty when shaping national immigration and asylum policies, and another with the alleged threat posed by NGOs and by international organizations supporting them, serving “foreign interests”. Furthermore, in June 2017, the first law sanctioning civil society organizations funded from abroad came into force. The preparatory discussion and communication campaign triggered a coordinated reaction from a group of civil society organizations, most of them affected by the new measure and targeted by the communication campaign. A remarkable event in this period was a solidarity protest of tens of thousands of people in support of the NGOs attacked by the government. After the law was passed, NGOs responded with various strategies, ranging from full compliance to open boycott framed as civil disobedience. Affected NGOs filed a complaint to the Hungarian Constitutional Court and to the European Court of Human Rights as well.
In July, the government launched a new communication campaign, the target of which was no longer the migrants or the political and bureaucratic elite of “Brussels”, but the philanthropist

[8] European Public Affairs, *Hungary Lose-lose Referendum*, 2016, <https://www.europeanpublicaffairs.eu/hungarys-lose-lose-referendum/>, accessed June 13, 2019.
[9] Human Rights Watch, *Hungary: Migrants Abused at the Border*, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/07/13/hungary-migrants-abused-border>, accessed June 13, 2019.
[10] 92.3 per cent of the total votes, or 98.4 per cent of the valid votes supported the government’s position.

businessman George Soros, who allegedly had plans to facilitate the irregular mass migration that Hungary was facing. This attack was not only against Soros as an individual, but also against several civil society actors who were either supported by the Open Society Foundations or were allegedly in close ideological relationships with Soros and the organizations he funded. In October, the government initiated a new national consultation, this time on the so-called "Soros Plan".

In September 2017, the European Court of Justice dismissed Hungary and Slovakia's complaint against the Council relocation decisions. The infringement procedure related to Hungary's non-compliance with the relocation scheme reached its final stage in December 2017, with the Commission handing over the case to the European Court of Justice.

In September 2017, the community of a small village stood against the organization of a holiday camp for refugee children by Migration Aid, once the leading volunteer organization in the reception crisis.[11] The conflict ended in intercommunity violence, when the mayor of the village resigned and the property of a local entrepreneur supporting the refugee children was vandalized by fellow villagers. The conflict attracted significant media attention from both the opposition and the pro-government media, which either talked about crossing a red line[12] or about the braveness of Hungarians fighting foreign invasion; the latter was articulated by the Prime Minister as well.[13]

Following the news of the recognition of 1,300 refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, a heated debate erupted in the media and in public discourse. Opposition parties accused the government of hypocrisy and demanded the strictness exhibited in its political communication. Social welfare organizations and refugee- or migrant-related NGOs were attacked by the opposition media for cooperating with the government in secrecy. As a result, Hungary suspended the implementation of its national programme related to the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, which was aimed at supporting activities related to reception or integration. This development resulted in the discontinuing of several services that had been available to refugees, reducing or even stopping the activities of some civil society organizations active in the field. In July 2018, after lengthy political and public debates and considerable mobilization on behalf of the affected civil society organizations, the parliament adopted a series of laws sanctioning NGOs and individuals working with immigrants and asylum seekers. The so-called "Stop Soros" legislative package has drawn the attention of the international community, and in July 2018 the European Commission launched an infringement procedure against Hungary because of it. Furthermore, an amendment to the law on taxation proposed that activities facilitating the immigration and permanent settlement of foreigners should be subjected to a special tax of 25 per cent of the cost of the activity. This caused much uncertainty among civil society organizations and service providers. As a result, a special university programme for refugees at the Central European University was suspended

[11] Migration Aid, *Why do you bring refugees into such hatred?*, <https://migrationaid.org/en/why-do-you-bring-refugees-into-such-hatred/>, accessed June 13, 2019.

[12] HVG, *Őcsény egy éve kifordult magából, ma a szégyen és a düh uralkodik a faluban* [One year ago Őcsény turned away, and today shame and anger reign in the village], 2018 (in Hungarian), <https://hvg.hu/itthon/20180925_ocseny_egy_ev_utan_menekultek_panzios_migration_aid>, accessed June 13, 2019.

[13] Pesti Srácok, *Orbán kiállt az őcsényiek mellett: „Az emberek nem akarnak migránsokat az országba, a falujukba"* [Orbán advocated for the people of Őcsény: "People do not want migrants to their country, to their village"], 2017 (in Hungarian), <https://pestisracok.hu/orban-kiallt-az-ocsenyiek-mellett-az-emberek-nem-akarnak-migransokat-az-orszagba-falujukba/>, accessed June 13, 2019.

temporarily[14] and the volunteer community organization Migration Aid announced that it would continue its activity as a political party.[15]

2. The Asylum System after the Crisis

As was made clear in the government's communications, setting up a so-called "legal border closure" was meant to be an indispensable part of the policy reaction to the 2015 crisis. As a result of the legal and policy changes that took place between September 2015 and July 2018, Hungary has created the most restrictive asylum and immigration policy in the European Union. In this analysis, we focus only on the developments that took place up until October 2016, but the restrictive trends are already visible. In the following years, further restrictions have been introduced, but the operational logic of the system has not changed. The main elements of the new border and asylum regimes were the following.

In July 2015, the government introduced lists of safe countries of origin and safe third countries to be taken into consideration when dealing with asylum applications. The two identical lists included EU and EEA member states as well as EU candidate countries, among a few others. Turkey was added to the lists later, when the EU–Turkey deal came into force. These lists made it technically possible to dismiss the asylum claims of those entering the country from Serbia. In the same period, the parliament passed an amendment to the Asylum Act removing procedural guarantees in order to speed up pending asylum procedures and lifting the suspensive effect of an appeal procedure.

In September, the government declared a state of crisis "caused by mass immigration"[16] in which the default operation of the asylum system could be suspended and legal rights and guarantees could be curtailed. The police and the military were granted special rights to limit personal freedoms in order to combat mass immigration and terrorism. Due to an amendment of the Penal Code, illegal crossing or damaging of the border fence became a criminal act. A new border procedure was introduced in the transit zones, where asylum seekers were supposed to submit their claims, and only the so-called vulnerable asylum seekers with special procedural or reception needs were let into Hungary to stay in an open or closed refugee reception centre.

In May 2016, a new amendment to the Asylum Act cut the integration support available for refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection. The principle was that foreigners should not be entitled to more benefits than Hungarian citizens and that any integration support might serve as a pull factor for further unwanted immigration.

In July 2016, another thorough amendment to the asylum and immigration laws took place, resulting in the system which has been in place to date, though it has been restricted further by another amendment in March 2017. The essence of this new measure was the introduction of the so-called 8 km rule mentioned above. The March 2017 amendment extended the application of this rule to the whole territory of Hungary and designated the transit zones as the only place where those who enter the country with the aim of seeking asylum can submit an asylum application and stay for the duration of the procedure.

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[14] Central European University, *CEU Suspends Education Programs for Registered Refugees and Asylum Seekers*, 2018, <https://www.ceu.edu/article/2018-08-28/ceu-suspends-education-programs-registered-refugees-and-asylum-seekers>, accessed June 13, 2019.

[15] Magyar Idők, *Párttá alakul a Migration Aid, hogy ne kelljen adót fizetniük* [Migration Aid becomes a party so they don't have to pay taxes], 2018 (in Hungarian), <https://www.magyaridok.hu/belfold/partta-alakul-a-migration-aid-hogy-ne-kelljen-adot-fizetniuk-3396913/>, accessed June 13, 2019.

[16] Daily News Hungary, *Orbán's cabinet again extends state of emergency due to migration crisis*, 2018, <https://dailynewshungary.com/orbans-cabinet-extends-state-emergency-due-migration-crisis/>, accessed June 13, 2019.

At the end of 2018, asylum seekers were being de facto detained in the transit zones along the Serbian border during the status determination process.[17] Particularly vulnerable people, such as families, children and unaccompanied minors over the age of fourteen are no exception. Only unaccompanied children under fourteen are placed in a special children's home. All applications submitted by people entering from Serbia are considered inadmissible. Appeals against the fast-track procedure are limited to a three-day period. The number of people allowed to enter the transit zones has been limited and the limit is continuously decreasing. For the past year, it has been only five people per week per entry point on average. All migrants apprehended in Hungarian territory without a legal right to stay are escorted to the other side of the border fence along the Serbian border.

These measures have resulted in a situation where the number of asylum seekers and consequently people receiving international protection has decreased to a few hundred per year. Open refugee reception centres are virtually empty and community-based accommodation of asylum seekers is no longer possible. Those who receive some form of international protection usually leave Hungary for a Western European country soon after their status is granted, and those who remain in Hungary face enormous hardships (Kováts 2016). Care and support are provided only by a handful of professional migration-specific NGOs, where there are only limited opportunities for volunteering. Therefore, the volunteer movements that came into being in the summer of 2015 are no longer operational, with the exception of only one movement, Migration Aid, which is still functioning.

One may ask about the political and policy gains from the introduction of such harsh measures, and especially from leaving them in place for so long. Hungary has been gradually becoming isolated from the international community due to its extreme stance on immigration and asylum, and there have been several pending infringement procedures initiated by the European Commission, connected to the country's policy and practice in asylum-related matters. An analysis by Boldizsár Nagy identifies six so-called "organizing categories" in terms of which the legal and policy developments and their role in formulating the relationship between political stakeholders, the public administration, the broader Hungarian society and the affected immigrants and asylum seekers can be interpreted (Nagy B. 2016). These categories are the following:

(1) *Denial* of the protection needs of irregular migrants arriving in Hungary, including systematically and consequentially referring to them as illegal immigrants, thus framing the issue in a securitization narrative.

(2) *Deterrence* with the aim of preventing potential asylum seekers from choosing Hungary as a destination or transit route. Deterrence is also extended to political and civil society groups that oppose the government's position.

(3) *Obstruction*, when the capacity and quality of the asylum system are not enhanced, facilities are closed down and procedural limits are set, with the aim of making it difficult to go through an asylum procedure and benefit from international protection.

(4) *Punishment*, when detention and expulsion are applied extensively, often with additional punitive elements such as a Schengen entry ban as a consequence of a minor offence.

(5) *Free-riding*, meaning a form of non-cooperation in finding a common European solution to the crisis, while still enjoying the benefits of EU legal and financial schemes. The most striking example is the country's non-compliance with the mandatory relocation mechanism and the explicit criticism of EU policies without seeking or offering common solutions to managing the crisis.

[17] See: European Court of Human Rights, *Case of Ilias and Ahmed v. Hungary*, 2017, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#{"itemid":["001-172091"]}>, accessed June 13, 2019.

(6) *Breaching superior law* is the last of the six interpretative categories offered by Nagy. It is apparent that several legal and administrative measures introduced by the government have been violating international, European or Hungarian law. The extraordinary measures and the use of the crisis situation as their pretext are a serious threat to the rule of law, both in Hungary and in the European Union.

This categorization may be helpful in giving a descriptive analysis of the policy developments during and after the reception crisis; however, it is equally important to take into consideration the expected political gains in order to fully understand the situation in Hungary. It is obvious that the key elements of the government's message are firmly supported by the majority of Hungarians and especially by those who vote for Fidesz, the dominant governing party. Therefore – as many analysts say – the anti-immigrant communication campaign and the restrictive immigration measures were able to effectively mobilize the voters of the governing party, securing their support throughout the 2014–18 parliamentary cycle (Fondation Robert Schuman 2018), and even securing another important victory in the 2018 spring parliamentary elections, when the party obtained 49.27 per cent of the vote in coalition with the Christian Democratic People's Party KDNP.

A further domestic political gain is the paralysing effect that the government's handling of the reception crisis and the accompanying political communication had on far-right political parties and movements. This may explain the relative lack of anti-immigrant and anti-refugee popular movements during the months of the crisis: the conflicting entities were the government and those involved in providing informal support for migrants. This framework could provide enough options for identification: helping refugees could become a form of political protest. Hungarian citizens who were not in favour of the mass irregular arrival of people could feel that their views and interests were strongly represented by the government and the law enforcement authorities; there was hardly room for demanding a stricter policy. This put the far-right parties – especially Jobbik, the largest opposition party in Parliament – in a difficult situation: they could either support the government's policy, thus giving up their stand-alone identity, or they could oppose it, thus alienating themselves from their radical constituency.

Another plausible explanation is that the immediate reception crisis seemed very difficult, if not impossible, to tackle through common European measures.[18] Hungary technically opted out of international and European asylum systems by unilaterally sealing its borders and dismantling its refugee protection system. Under this explanation, this was in order to alleviate the burden on the asylum and immigration systems and to prevent social tensions stemming from a prolonged crisis if Austria and Germany were to stop receiving asylum seekers entering via Hungarian territory.

The third rationale is that these decisions were made in order to maintain a "policy playground" on which the boundaries of European cooperation and solidarity could be tested with relatively little political risk and cost. Asylum had already been a contested field of European policy implementation, and finding allies in challenging this system seemed to be paying off, at least in the short run (Sándor 2018).

2.1. Political communication and public debate

The government's communication campaigns during and after the crisis created a discursive framework that had a very strong, almost excessive impact on the actors involved. There are several theoretical models that may be helpful in analysing and deconstructing these frameworks. The most frequently mentioned is the concept of *securitization*. Analysts maintain that securitization is effective when it is audience-centred, context-dependent and power-laden, involving not only discursive elements but actual processes, measures and tools (Balzacq et al.

[18] The failure of the two relocation mechanisms is a clear example of this. See for example: Selo Sabic (2017).

2016). The Hungarian government's active involvement in handling the refugee reception crisis through legal, administrative and logistical interventions is a vivid example of this complex process of securitization (Szalai and Gőbl 2016).

Another interpretative framework used by analysts of the discursive patterns of the government's messaging is the theory of *moral panic*. According to this concept, a moral panic occurs when the importance and significance of a social process or problem is exaggerated, either in comparison with its assessments based on other, more reliable and valid sources, or in relative terms compared with other, apparently more serious, problems. It is important to note that, although there exist exaggerations around it, the problem is real, it exists and it is not only a construction by those setting the political agenda (Cohen 1972). Generating and maintaining moral panic can be an effective tool for social and political mobilization, as the events around and following the reception crisis showed (Sik 2016).

The communicative framing of the Hungarian situation emerged in a relatively early phase of the crisis, with the first set of billboard posters and the questions of the first national consultation on the issue establishing the framework.[19] What came afterwards was only a gradual shift of the emphasis in line with contextual changes and the intrinsic inertia and evolution of the political messaging. We can identify three discourse trends:

(1) Framing the situation as an economic issue. Immigration and immigrants are depicted as a threat to the labour market and the domestic labour force. They compete for employment, they lower wages and they "take the jobs from Hungarians", as one of the billboards said. A counterpart of this message is immigrants' access to welfare support without contributing to its costs. These messages had a long history in Hungarian political communication and were the main foundations of negative sentiments towards immigrants or towards ethnic Hungarians enjoying preferential immigration or naturalization rights (Enyedi et al. 2004). Interestingly, this was the message that was least supported, according to public opinion polls, and references made to the threats concerning employment or welfare were quickly abandoned by the government's communication strategy.[20]

(2) Framing the situation as a security issue. Immigration, especially in a mass and uncontrolled form, is portrayed as a threat to public order and a source of conflict. Immigrants committing petty crimes or sexual and gender-based violence against members of local communities have been recurrent communication topics, often serving as a "last resort" when there are no major issues to report. Another more emphasized aspect of the security issue is the threat to national security, especially the risk of terrorism caused by immigration. This narrative was especially strong during 2016, when several radical Islamist terrorist attacks provided grounds for keeping it alive. Towards the end of 2017 and throughout 2018, the narrative on national security and terrorism somewhat receded, making room for a more general discourse around public security and criminality.

(3) Framing the situation as a cultural conflict. In this discourse, immigration is depicted as a threat to the cultural integrity of the community. The identification of the community in question varies from Hungary only to the Central-Eastern European region or Europe as a whole. According to this narrative, democratic values and fundamental freedoms are at risk. Non-EU migration represents a threat to both left-wing liberal values and to a "Christian Europe". This cultural threat results from unconscious or even deliberate mistakes reproduced by cosmopolitan, liberal elites (the political and bureaucratic elite

[19] For a detailed analysis of the discursive framework of the consultation see: Á. Bocskor (2018).

[20] See: Századvég, *Plakátháború kinek van igaza* [Billboard war, who is right], 2015 (in Hungarian), <https://szazadveg.hu/hu/kutatasok/az-alapitvany-kutatasai/piackutatas-kozvelemeny-kutatas/plakathaboru-kinek-van-igaza>, accessed June 13, 2019.

in Brussels in particular), the left-wing and liberal political opposition in Hungary, international and national NGOs and various UN organizations. This culturalist narrative often refers to Islam as a cultural system that is fundamentally incompatible with European norms and values.

Apart from mainstream narratives, there have been several counter-narratives emerging from civil society movements, academia and the political opposition in Hungary. The most common counter-narrative has taken a reactive position, opposing the claim that mass irregular migration would represent a threat to security, the economy or culture. Relativizing the extent of the issue has been another typical counter-argument, supported by references to the relative proportion of newcomers among the overall European population, or comparisons between the Hungarian situation and that of other European countries.

Many actors, especially within church-based movements, framed the situation as a humanitarian issue. Their counter-narrative tended to depict newcomer asylum seekers as people escaping from violence and poverty, in need of immediate care and help. Providing support, accordingly, is a moral duty, regardless of the broader political, cultural or economic connotations of the crisis. Aid organizations often adopted this specific perspective and focused only on providing support to migrants, without taking a position in the public and political debate. However, the moral argument appeared as a rationale behind the symbolic protest against the government's policy: by declaring the government's action and message as cruel and inhuman, volunteers could engage in philanthropic actions as a restorative process, or to express their disapproval of the government's policy.[21]

Framing the situation as a human rights issue was another counter-narrative, mostly used by human rights and advocacy organizations. This narrative depicted immigrants as targets of public communication campaigns and restrictive policies, and argued that their human rights were being violated. A somewhat similar counter-narrative views the refugee issue as an international legal and political matter taking place in a common European legal and political system. According to this narrative, Hungary should play by the rules. This more legalistic argument was often used by academics criticizing the government's policies, or by experts from NGOs advocating for refugee rights (Nagy B. 2017).[22]

2.2. Reaction of the public – survey and public opinion poll findings

The popularity of the Orbán government and its approach to the post-2015 refugee issue can be explained by Hungary's generalized negative attitudes towards immigration. Looking at the results of the last Eurobarometer survey dealing with migration- and asylum-related issues before 2015, Hungary's position then already indicated what the reaction to the crisis would be. Public opinion was already strongly critical before 2015, but immigration was not perceived by the majority of Hungarians as a central concern.[23] Surveys indicate that the government's communication campaigns had a strong negative impact during and after 2015, although public opinion did not really change. Rather, political actors influenced already existing trends and tendencies were reinforced or accelerated, while differences in opinion deepened and became more polarized.

Another telling example of the negative disposition of Hungarians even before the crisis is the study by Messing and Ságvári (2018), based on data from the European Social Survey between

[21] A remarkable example of the above is the protest organized by Migration Aid in early September against the government's handling of the crisis, with the title "Not in My Name". See: Facebook, *Az én nevemben ne – Not in my name*, <https://www.facebook.com/events/139528093057286/>, accessed June 13, 2019.

[22] See also: Hungarian Helsinki Committee, *No country for refugees*, 2015, <https://www.helsinki.hu/wp-content/uploads/HHC_Hungary_Info_Note_Sept-2015_No_country_for_refugees.pdf>, accessed June 13, 2019.

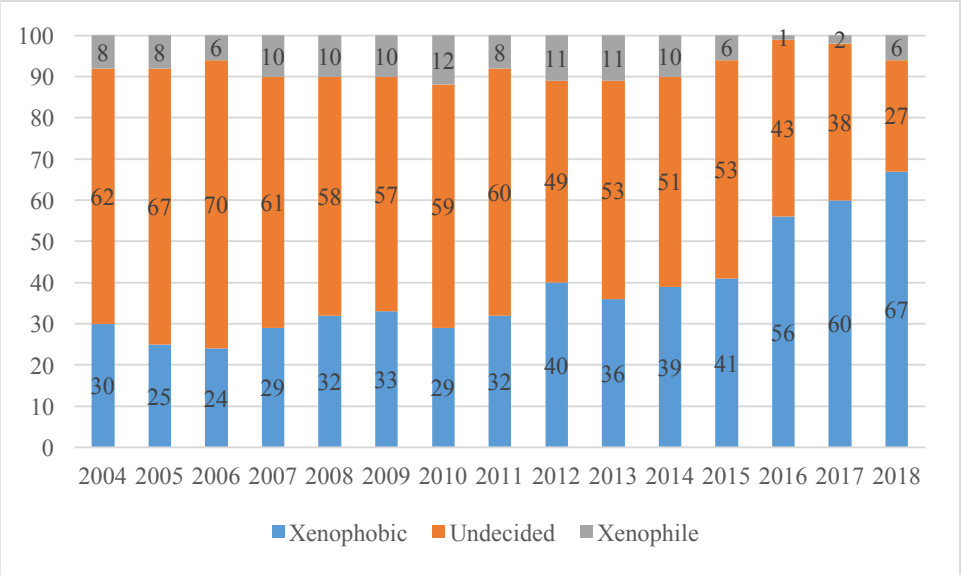
[23] Special Eurobarometer 415, *Europeans in 2014 – Report*, 2014, Wave EB81.2 – TNS Opinion & Social, p. 35 and 132, <https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/archives/ebs/ebs_415_en.pdf>, accessed June 13, 2019.

autumn 2014 and spring 2015. Operating with three composite indexes in the dimensions of "social distance", "fear" and "rejection", the data analysis shows that in all three dimensions, Hungarians have strong negative attitudes toward immigrants. Concerning social distance and fear, only Czechs show stronger negative attitudes. Concerning rejection, Hungarians are the most negative: almost half of the population are in favour of not letting in anybody coming from a poorer country. In some other Central-Eastern European countries, this opinion is shared by only a quarter of the population, whereas in those Western European countries that have the highest proportion of immigrants, hardly anybody thinks this way.

The extremely polarized and one-dimensional nature of Hungarian public opinion on letting in immigrants is further demonstrated by a recent survey by the Pew Research Centre. Out of the twenty-seven countries surveyed worldwide, Hungary had by far the highest proportion (45 per cent) of those who did not want to let anybody in.[24]

Looking at the results of a longitudinal survey conducted at least once a year by TÁRKI social research centre, the change in public attitudes during and after the crisis is clearly visible. There is not sufficient data available to demonstrate the impact of the government's communication campaigns, but it would be difficult to rule out their contribution to the changing attitudes (Sik 2016). TÁRKI's longitudinal research is a particularly good indicator of the changing attitudes during and after the crisis, as it consists of only one question about citizens' willingness to let in "fleeing people".[25] Based on the responses, there are three types of attitudes identified: those who do not want to let anybody in are called "xenophobes", those who would let everybody in are labelled "xenophiles", whereas those who would let in certain people while excluding others are called "undecided".[26] As Figure 5.3 shows, the proportion of xenophobes, who would not let in anyone, has grown significantly since 2015.

Figure 5.3: Hungarians' attitude toward foreigners.



Source: TÁRKI Omnibusz, 2004–18.

3. Citizens' Mobilization During and After the Reception Crisis

[24] See: Connor and Krogstad (2018). The detailed figures are available on page 4 of the topline results annex.

[25] The question deliberately avoids using the term "refugee" or "asylum seeker" so as not to offer the respondents a narrow, legalistic interpretation of the situation.

[26] See the latest results and analysis: 24, *Nyomkodja a kormány a pánikgombot, így egyre jobban irtózunk az idegenektől* [The government is pushing the panic button, so we are getting more and more xenophobic], 2018 (in Hungarian), <https://24.hu/belfold/2018/12/19/migrans-moralispanik-kutatas/>, accessed June 13, 2019.

The activities of volunteer movements in Hungary have been short-lived but particularly intense. In contrast with other countries where the arrival, transit and settlement of asylum seekers and refugees lasted for several months or even years, in Hungary everything happened in a short time period from mid-June to mid-October 2015. The volunteer movements emerged relatively quickly and the time they were active was not long enough to undergo different phases of organizational development and diversification. Many questions related to the sustainability and institutionalization of volunteer movements are less relevant in the case of the Hungarian movements, as their operational environment changed quickly and abruptly. On the other hand, the scale and magnitude of social mobilization was rather extraordinary, though in the context of the severity of the crisis in Budapest and in some country towns, together with the highly politicized nature of the issue, it was not surprising.

Overall, four major phases can be identified in the lifespan of the voluntary movements. The first phase corresponds to the month-long period from mid-June to mid-July, when the movements were brought to life and their organizational profiles and identities were shaped. The second phase covers roughly two months between mid-July and mid-September (the time of the closure of the Serbian border and the disappearance of migrants from public spaces), when the volunteer groups (alongside many individuals) were in full operation, coordinating and providing services. The third phase is the transition period during the month between the two border closures, first with Serbia and subsequently with Croatia, when volunteers were trying to maintain access to people they were determined to help, even if this was with diminishing success due to the lack of cooperation from the authorities. The last phase corresponds to the aftermath of the crisis months, when volunteer groups were trying to refocus their activities and resources in order to keep their services running. Indeed, some continued their activities abroad along the Balkans Route, others were trying to extend help to different disadvantaged groups in Hungary, while others tried to gain access to asylum seekers and refugees within the Hungarian asylum system. Several individuals who played a crucial coordinating role in these movements ended up working or volunteering for professional organizations in the field of asylum or migration.

Remarkably, the mobilization and the emerging volunteer groups and grassroots organizations were almost exclusively pro-refugee or pro-migrant. There were only sporadic attempts to actively mobilize against migrants. The most visible of the negative forms of mobilization were the actions of the mayor of Ásotthalom, a village on the Serbian border, which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Another example was a demonstration organized by the far-right movement Hatvannégy Vármegye against migrants and citizens helping them. It took place in mid-July in front of the Keleti Railway Station, where most refugees stayed before boarding a train to Austria. Although they announced the continuation of such demonstrations, there was no follow-up to the event. On an earlier occasion, members of the Betyársereg far-right paramilitary group visited Ásotthalom to help the locals patrol the border and protect their village. The mayor refused their help, and the group got lost in the border zone and ended up in Szeged harassing the volunteers who were helping migrants to board trains to Budapest.

In light of the above, one may wonder why there has not been stronger anti-immigrant mobilization. The government's negative communication campaigns seemed to fuel these sentiments, as reflected by the previously discussed public opinion poll findings. The government's communication campaigns and the restrictive administrative measures probably had the effect of reassuring the public that the migration and asylum issues were being handled properly by the responsible authorities and that there was no need for additional mobilization.

3.1. Civil society organizations involved in the reception crisis

It is important to emphasize that engagement among civil society was not only characterized by the emergence of grassroots voluntary movements. Existing formal structures also turned

their attention to migrants, offering various types of support. Some of these organizations also attracted volunteers, therefore civil society mobilization took place in several parallel frameworks. Organizations that became active in supporting migrants during the crisis display certain specific characteristics. The following categorization is an attempt to highlight the main specificities of each of them.

Firstly, specialized organizations that were already active in the field can be identified. For many of these organizations, the reception crisis posed a professional and strategic challenge. They had the expertise and infrastructure to react quickly, although maintaining a balance between existing and new activities was not always easy. Most of them did not engage in the relief and aid work carried out by the volunteer groups and rather integrated the work of the volunteers with professional input, catalysing or even coordinating services. In a later phase, the crisis meant new funding and support opportunities for some professional NGOs. Some of these organizations became the targets of criticism by volunteers for their low visibility and apparent reluctance or inability to engage in new activities.

A second typology is other human rights organizations. The crisis meant an opportunity for engagement for these organizations, which quickly took the lead in framing the issue as a series of human rights violations, as mentioned earlier. They often entered into conflict with political entities and the administration, and established strong contacts with grassroots volunteer movements in supporting mobilization and in providing legal support and advice.

Mainstream service providers and aid organizations were also involved in the refugee issue, although these actors were probably the least visible during the crisis. Some of them were NGOs, while some were governmental or municipal agencies working in social welfare, child protection, healthcare or education. Their involvement was based on professional commitment, opening up their targeted specialized services to migrants. They were relatively slow to react, since establishing working relationships based on trust with volunteer groups or migrant-specific organizations took longer. This was also because most of them had an interest in keeping a low profile, as sometimes they lacked the legal or administrative authorization to extend their services to immigrants, or they were afraid of negative repercussions from the ministries or municipalities under which they operated.

Traditional welfare and aid organizations in the Charity Council were also slow to react on their own. In the initial phase of the reception crisis, they seemed to be hesitating or maintaining ambiguous positions. These organizations were characterized by double (or multiple) loyalties, commitments and conflicting interests. On the one hand, they were accountable for the public supporters of their charity-driven missions and humanitarian principles. On the other hand, they were highly dependent on governmental and state funding, and their loyalty was demanded by the administration. However, the government decided to rely on the services of these organizations during and after the crisis, excluding the services of the volunteer movements and other sectorial NGOs. Once engaged, their involvement was mainly symbolic and mediatized, often due to their lack of sufficient capacity and strategic guidance from the authorities. Towards the end of the crisis, and especially between the two border closures, their involvement became more established, though there was much criticism from the volunteer groups regarding the efficiency of their work. It is hard to assess retrospectively, as there is surprisingly little public and transparent evidence of their contribution.[27]

Grassroots movements brought into being by the crisis were the most dynamic and visible actors on the scene. The most active phase of the crisis (the four months from mid-June to mid-October) was characterized by the strong visibility of these organizations in the public space, where migrants appeared in large numbers, and in the community media space, where people were organizing their activities, exchanging information and entering into public discussions

[27] One exception is the report by the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta (Győri-Dani and Solymári (2016).

and debates. These groups had a strong base of participants and were able to react quickly and flexibly and to mobilize considerable means and resources, human capacity and later expertise. Initially, the focus of their activity was strongly pragmatic and humanitarian, responding to the immediate needs of the migrants. The main aims were facilitating people's movement during their transit across Hungary and alleviating suffering through responding to basic nutrition, health and accommodation needs. The majority of the people involved were non-professional individuals volunteering in their free time, acting based on moral considerations. This makes a professional assessment of their work difficult and somewhat out of place. There were significant differences between groups regarding the level of coordination and the efficiency of their work. In areas where a single group dominated, the issue of coordination was less problematic than in areas where several groups appeared. Their relationship with the authorities was rather controversial: they made a continuous effort to claim formal recognition, which hardly ever came, and once they joined the protests and mobilization efforts organized by advocacy and human rights organizations they quickly became the target of the government's communication campaigns. However, their high visibility and the continuous media attention around them made it possible for some groups or individuals to emerge as new voices. Lay volunteers and spokespersons for volunteer groups were invited to policy debates on the future of the European asylum system, and Migration Aid, the biggest group, became active in mobilizing, organizing protests and calling for action against the government's policy.

A survey conducted in October 2015 found that there might have been as many as 190,000 people involved in volunteering, donating goods or other forms of engagement during the reception crisis (Zakariás 2016). The same survey found that about 30 per cent of the population were open to helping refugees, most of them motivated by religious or philanthropic aims or adhering to the moral duty of alleviating suffering. Another 20 per cent supported the general objective of helping refugees, but thought that it should be responsibility of the state or public institutions rather than of volunteers. There were another 20 per cent who strongly opposed support for refugees under any circumstances. The survey also showed that the majority of respondents had a seemingly inconsistent attitude toward volunteering and humanitarianism: they could support arguments both for and against helping refugees.

Another factor that contributed to volunteer mobilization during the crisis was the potential for political protest through actions that were clearly in conflict with the government's views (Feischmidt and Zakariás 2019). As the opposition parties could not offer an alternative to the government's policies, and they could not join the philanthropic mobilization either, many people interpreted the volunteering as a symbolic protest against the government or against Fidesz, the leading party.

3.2. The unfolding conflict between the government and civil society

It is important to note that the various civil society actors had different types of relationship with the government during the reception crisis. There are two problems with interpreting the civil society–government relationship that should be acknowledged here. When identifying the actors, not only does civil society prove to be a heterogeneous entity, but the government appears to be an equally elusive concept. On a discursive or policymaking (legislative) level, the situation is relatively easy: we can easily identify the government with the Prime Minister, relevant ministers or government spokespersons and sometimes officials and civil servants presenting or interpreting strategies or policies. When it comes to everyday policy implementation or general operation in a critical situation, there are several further interfaces where representatives of state authorities, public institutions, law enforcement or service providing agencies encounter individual citizens or members of civil society organizations or movements. Due to the great variety in the actors involved, these interactions can be characterized by a wide range of modalities.

The government's relationship with the human rights advocacy agencies that had been heavily criticizing both its political discourse and its administrative measures was characterized by open conflict. The most notable organizations of this kind were the Hungarian Helsinki Committee and Amnesty International Hungary. As a reaction, the government mostly ignored, belittled or negated the activities of the volunteer movements. Although these initiatives mobilized enormous resources and made huge efforts to help people gain access to basic care and provisions, their work has never been formally acknowledged by the authorities they worked with, or by the government in general. These volunteer movements appeared in the protests and demonstrations organized during the summer of 2015, but remained non-political throughout the crisis period. Migration Aid, the largest of them, was something of an exception. Indeed, its spokesperson received significant media attention and regularly appeared in public and political debates. In September, the movement organized a demonstration against the proposed restrictions of immigration and asylum laws.

Yet there were also organizations, usually already active in the field, that simply continued their migrant- or refugee-related activities without any notable conflicts with the authorities. These were smaller, professional NGOs such as Menedék Association, Artemisszió Foundation and Cordelia Foundation. These organizations often closely cooperated with the authorities in a pragmatic and focused manner. For example, Menedék Association operated a crisis counselling team around the police collection points along the Serbian and Croatian border, in close cooperation with the Border Police Headquarters in Szeged.

Especially during the first two years after the unfolding of the reception crisis, the government's communication campaigns were less critical regarding the activities of civil society organizations helping migrants and asylum seekers. Initially, the benevolence of these organizations and individuals was not questioned; only their supposed lack of knowledge of the larger scale of the problem was mentioned occasionally. However, as the volunteer organizations became more outspoken in claiming rights and fair treatment for the people they were supporting, including the right to freedom of movement and access to asylum and fair administrative procedures, as well as to care and basic reception conditions, the government became more explicit in condemning or discrediting their activities.

The mobilization brought into being by the reception crisis became increasingly politicized over time, which also brought an additional dynamic into the relationship between the government and civil society actors. Human rights advocacy groups and grassroots migrant organizations organized or joined demonstrations and engaged in mediatized public communication criticizing the government's measures. This situation resulted in a gradual shift in the relationship: as the crisis accelerated, it became increasingly conflict-ridden, and the debate over migration and asylum policies became extremely polarized. The debate remained strongly polarized after the peak of the crisis was over in Hungary as well, and was further amplified when the government started its campaign against the EU relocation scheme in the spring of 2016. Several civil society organizations took an explicitly political stance, ending up actively campaigning for preventing the success of the referendum in October.

Lastly, we should mention those organizations with whom the government established a strategic or political (symbolic) alliance. These were the large established charity or aid organizations that had already participated in government-sponsored programs or played a crucial role in maintaining healthcare, education or social welfare services. These were, most notably, the six member agencies of the Charity Council, established in 2000 to administer the distribution of confiscated goods among people in need.[28] These agencies joined the civil society mobilization somewhat belatedly. The only exception was the Hungarian Red Cross,

[28] Its member agencies are the following: Caritas Hungary; Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta; Hungarian Interchurch Aid; Hungarian Red Cross; Charity Service of the Reformed Church; Hungarian Baptist Aid. See more: Karitativ Tanács, <http://karitativtanacs.kormany.hu/>, accessed June 13, 2019.

which replaced the services of Menedék Association in the border collection centre at the end of June. Members of grassroots organizations often complained about the lack of visibility and accessibility of these organizations, which avoided drawing much public and media attention to the services they provided.[29] In any case, once the borders were sealed, psychosocial services in the border transit zones were taken over by member organizations of the Charity Council and other organizations gradually lost their authorization to operate in those premises.

In the initial phase of the crisis it is possible find some examples of constructive cooperation between authorities and civil society actors in the field. This cooperation was hindered by conflicting identities within the administration. Representatives of the authorities had to balance loyalty to political directives with their professional conscience. This gradually resulted in either adjustments to the political directives or important impacts on professional careers, including changing position or leaving the administration. At an early point, there was a widespread approach within the administration that made a distinction between media-broadcast political rhetoric and pragmatic action, but actions gradually adjusted to match the political and discursive frameworks. Once the strong pressure caused by mass irregular immigration lowered, criticism towards civil society actors for being opposed to government policies became increasingly prevalent in the mainstream political discourse. Depicting civil society organizations as non-patriotic, even as threats to national security, was the discursive framework that preceded the introduction of the legislative amendments sanctioning NGOs and the political campaign against George Soros and EU institutions.

3.4. Summing up – the present situation

The following quotation from Prime Minister Viktor Orbán summarizes the full spectrum of the Hungarian government's interpretation of the situation during and after the reception crisis:

> Those who do most to endanger the future of Europe are not those who want to come here, but the political, economic and intellectual leaders who are trying to reshape Europe against the will of the people of Europe. This is how, for the planned transport [sic.] to Europe of many millions of migrants, there came into existence the most bizarre coalition in world history: the people smugglers, the human rights activists and Europe's top leaders.[30]

Following 2015, there has been a continuous dismantling of the refugee protection system as a result of the anti-immigration political campaign. In essence, the government did not create an immigration system that could effectively control the borders on one hand and safeguard human rights on the other hand. At the same time, symbolic and strategic political communication has had a strong impact on the level of administration and law enforcement, causing serious harm to field actors, structures and practices. The anti-immigration narrative is still alive today, with even more radicalized positions seen both in the discourse and in political action.

There has not been any effective counter-narrative that has been able to gain significant popular support. Experts, civil society and international organizations are isolated from mass communication and increasingly targeted by the anti-immigrant rhetoric. The visibility of and social support for civil society actors involved in immigration issues grew significantly during the crisis and in the subsequent months. Later, social support diminished and the debate concerning civil society actors and their role became increasingly polarized. A vocal minority has remained supportive of refugee-oriented or human rights NGOs, whereas a similarly vocal

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[29] An exception is the demonstrative visit of the Prime Minister's wife to a temporary refugee shelter in early July as the Goodwill Ambassador of the Hungarian Interchurch Aid, which got considerable media attention.

[30] See: Kormány, *Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's State of the Nation Address*, 2016, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-state-of-the-nation-address>, accessed June 13, 2019.

majority has aligned with the position of the government. Most of the volunteer movements have ceased operating or have lost the attention of the public media. Most NGOs try to remain non-political, whereas human rights organizations are increasingly taking on a political role. Overall, grassroots movements and human rights organizations have become the target of political attacks as the last phase of the government's political campaign. They have been labelled foreign agents, traitors or enemies of the nation. As already mentioned, the new legislation on NGOs and the related political communication campaign restricted the space for civil society action, and open support for pro-refugee organizations is becoming a risky business. Although to date there has not been any direct measure taken against these organizations based on the new legislation, there have been several indirect administrative and journalistic inquiries and actions that can considerably hinder their work. The general public attitude towards civil society action is now overtly politicized. Participation in support activities, volunteering and even expressing political support are today affected by a fear of repercussions from the government or public authorities.