

# **An overview of the migration policies and trends - Hungary**

**Ilona Moricz**

## **Abstract:**

*Although the economic hardships have influenced recent migration trends in Hungary, it has remained a country of low intensity in and out migration. Hungary's population today is less than 10 million, and it is decreasing despite the somewhat positive migratory gain since the 1980s.*

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In the past ten years, the share of foreigners (foreign citizens) as part of Hungary's population has doubled from one to 2.1 %. The share of foreigners has increased every year since Hungary's entry into the European Union in 2004 - their number exceeded 200 000 on 1 January 2011 - and this trend is likely to continue. Foreigners represent less than 4 % of the active part of the labour force in Hungary.<sup>1</sup>

The majority of migrants come from Europe - traditionally ethnic Hungarians from Romania, Ukraine, and Serbia. Recently the migration from Germany to Hungary has also increased at a fast rate. The largest migrant population from outside Europe is from Asia. While their number is rising, this group only constitutes 12.7 % of all migrants to Hungary. The largest community is still from China, although diminishing due to the deteriorated economic environment in Hungary.

Geographically the migrants reside mainly in the central - most prosperous - regions of the country, including Budapest. In addition, the Southern counties bordering with Serbia and the North Eastern regions close to Ukraine and Romania also have relatively high proportions of foreign residents.

## **Impact of economic crisis**

Long-term migration to Hungary has declined: in 2010 it decreased by 6 % compared to 2009 and by 32 % of the 2008 record level. The number of issued work permits also declined in 2010 by 13 % compared to 2009 and the two-thirds of work permits were issued to immigrants from neighbouring countries. On the other hand, reflecting stronger ties to EU economies, the share of EU15 nationals in the migrant population has increased from the 10

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<sup>1</sup> Hungary 2011 - Hungarian Central Statistical Office, p. 22. Budapest, 2012 - latest download: 3 November 2012.  
<http://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xftp/idoszaki/mo/mo2011.pdf>

% at the early 2000s to 21 % in 2010.<sup>2</sup> While the newcomer population is higher educated and a more active participant of the labour force than the average in Hungary, their employment is restricted. Third-country nationals can only be hired if they have a work permit, or if they are long-term residents. The Labour Market Mobility Law which came into force in 2010, has somewhat improved this situation by granting them equal access to self-employment.

In contrast to the declining labour migration to Hungary which has not been a major "sending" country for decades, the number of Hungarians leaving to work abroad has increased in recent years. Although no exact statistics exist about Hungarian emigrants from the past years, their number reportedly doubled in the neighbouring Burgenland province of Austria since 2010<sup>3</sup> and in Germany, the largest trading partner of Hungary, where it reached 102 000 in June 2012 (compared to 65 000 in 2010).<sup>4</sup> Similarly, 7 % more Hungarian physicians and nurses received work permits abroad, mostly in the United Kingdom and Germany in 2011 than a year earlier. This trend has already put a heavy burden on the health care system at home, because the annual number of leaving doctors exceeded that of the fresh graduates in 2012.<sup>5</sup>

### **Legal and policy changes**

Hungary does not have any overall policy document on migration policy and the integration of migrants, and the latest draft failed in 2007. In this area, Hungary is lagging behind countries in the region - Slovakia, Austria, and the Czech Republic. The elaboration of a coherent integration strategy and relevant legal harmonization has been long urged by migration experts and international organizations. According to a most recent decision of the Hungarian government, such a migration strategy should be elaborated by the Ministry of Interior by the end of August 2013.

The current Hungarian migration policy has three main features: it supports the free movement within the EU and fully respects the Schengen laws; implements a strict and non-supportive policy toward third-country nationals of non-Hungarian origin; and clearly supports the immigration of ethnic Hungarians living in neighbouring countries.

The amended citizenship law introducing a simplified and preferential naturalisation procedure for persons of Hungarian descent came into effect in January 2011. It offers full citizenship to all persons who can claim some ethnic Hungarian background and/or one ancestor living on Hungarian territories. While in 2010 a total 6 086 persons received Hungarian citizenship, between January 2011 and March 2012, a record high number – 230

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<sup>2</sup> Data published by International Migration Outlook 2012, OECD - latest download: 3 November 2012.

[http://www.oecd.org/els/internationalmigrationpoliciesanddata/IMO%202012\\_Country%20Note%20Hungary.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/els/internationalmigrationpoliciesanddata/IMO%202012_Country%20Note%20Hungary.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> see the article of HVG, Magyar munkások Ausztriában: majdnem utolértük a törököket - latest download: 3 December 2012. [http://hvg.hu/gazdasag/20121024\\_Magyar\\_munkasok\\_Ausztriaban\\_majdnem\\_utole](http://hvg.hu/gazdasag/20121024_Magyar_munkasok_Ausztriaban_majdnem_utole)

<sup>4</sup> see the article of HVG, Csúcson a magyar kivándorlás Németországban, 2012. július 20. Latest download: [http://hvg.hu/gazdasag/20120720\\_csucson\\_a\\_magyar\\_kivandorlas\\_Nemetorszagb](http://hvg.hu/gazdasag/20120720_csucson_a_magyar_kivandorlas_Nemetorszagb)

<sup>5</sup> Hungary 2011 - Hungarian Central Statistics Office, p. 22. Budapest, 2012

000 - naturalization requests were submitted and 130 000 people - mainly from Romania - swore to a new citizenship oath.<sup>6</sup>

For third-country nationals the access to citizenship has remained a lengthy and restrictive procedure. Formally they can acquire citizenship in 8 years after receiving the permanent residence permit which requires at least 3 years residence in the country, so on the whole it usually takes up 11 years. Spouses of Hungarian citizens have to prove 3 years marriage and 3 years of residence. In case of ordinary applicants a further problem is that, applications may be rejected without reasoning and they have no right to appeal.

### **Migration and education**

Access to education by migrants is still limited, because Hungary does not allow undocumented migrants to access the full education system, neither it grants such access automatically for children of all legal migrants. Schools rarely address the training needs of newcomers and intercultural education has been almost exclusively provided for via EU-funded projects.

As for the higher education, in the school year 2009/2010 the number of foreign students enrolled was 18 154, representing 4.9 % of overall student population in higher education (this is a 50 % lower share than that for example in the UK, France and Germany). Students come from Romania, Slovakia, Ukraine, Serbia, Germany, Norway, Iran, Israel, Sweden, Nigeria, Turkey, US, Cyprus, and China. The share of foreign students is strikingly high at Hungarian medical universities where they make up 41 % of the overall student body.<sup>7</sup>

### **Asylum seekers and refugees**

The number of asylum seekers in Hungary decreased in 2011 to 1 693 from 2 100 registered in 2010.<sup>8</sup> While many refugees fled to Hungary during the war in the Balkans due to geographical proximity, many of them returned. Their number dropped especially after the EU visa exemption agreement with Serbia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) in 2009. Today, the vast majority of refugees come from Afghanistan. Their number will probably continue to fluctuate in the next few years in response to different humanitarian emergencies by Hungary.

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<sup>6</sup> kormány.hu - 2012. március 14.: <http://www.kormany.hu/hu/kozigazgatasi-es-igazsagugyi-miniszterium/nemzetpolitikaert-felelos-allamtitkarsag/hirek/honositas-eddig-230-ezer-allampolgarsagi-kerelem-erkezett>  
<sup>7</sup> József Berács: Diák mobilitás és Magyarország vonzereje, Budapest, 2010, page 46 and Statisztikai Tájékoztatók, Felsőoktatás, OKM (NEFM)

<sup>8</sup> Csökkent a menedékkérők száma 2011-ben Közép-Európában - UNHCR, 27 March 2012 <http://www.unhcr-centraleurope.org/hu/hirek/2012/csokkent-a-menedekkerok-szama-2011-ben-kozep-europaban.html>

Legal changes affecting refugees include the amendment of the Asylum Act (2010) when Hungary changed its reception system for the unaccompanied minors who are placed in specific child-protection facilities outside reception centres, and the Act on the Entry and Stay of Foreigners (2010). "Hungary is today one of the three EU countries (beside Greece and Malta) that most systematically detain asylum-seekers for irregular border entry – detention being the rule, rather than the exception," said the UNHCR report in 2012.<sup>9</sup> As an unprecedented move, more than a hundred refugees demonstrated in Budapest on 20 November 2012 calling the authorities to ensure their rights to housing, health care, learning Hungarian and adopt integration policy similar in other EU countries. As a result of international and domestic criticism, and the apparent dysfunction of the widespread application of detention, the Asylum Act was amended in December 2012, restricting the circumstances under which asylum seekers can be detained. The amended came into force on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2013.

### **Information about the author:**

*Ilona Móricz is the director of the [Center for Independent Journalism](#) (CIJ), a Hungarian media development foundation which has a mission to support quality and ethical journalism in Hungary.*

*A journalist by profession, Ilona Móricz worked at the Hungarian News Agency (MTI) as editor of the international news department for more than ten years. In 1991 she moved for Kurír, the first privately owned political daily newspaper in Hungary where she was foreign news and feature editor. Since 1997 Ilona Móricz has worked as deputy director, then director of the Center for Independent Journalism. As part of her managerial duties, she has coordinated CIJ's international and national projects on journalism training including reporting diversity (minorities, gender), investigative journalism, media research and publication, multimedia content production and media self-regulation. In 2006 she served as President of the South East European Network for Professionalization of Media (SEENPM), a network of 18 non-profit media centers in 12 countries and currently she is a board member of this organization.*

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<sup>9</sup> Asylum-seekers treated like criminals in Hungary: UNHCR Latest download: 3 November 2012: <http://www.unhcr-centraleurope.org/en/news/2012/asylum-seekers-treated-like-criminals-in-hungary.html>