

# CHANGES IN SOCIAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS REFUGEES IN HUNGARY

SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF BENEFICIARIES  
OF INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION IN HUNGARY  
– NIEM POLICY BRIEFS

ÁDÁM NÉMETH

# ATTITUDES

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\* External expert. Research Fellow at the University of Pécs and OeAD Postdoctoral Researcher at the Austrian Academy of Sciences. The analysis does not necessarily reflect the views of the Menedék Association or other NIEM partners. The author analysed the changes in social attitudes towards refugees in Hungary in a non-political way, with scientific objectivity.



## Executive summary

Integration itself is a two-way process that requires efforts from both the individual and the host society. After all, it is useless for a person to be ready to integrate if the host environment does not support him or her in this process. However, the NIEM indicators do not collect information on the views of the host society. The analysis is intended to fill this gap by examining changes in social attitudes towards refugees in Europe and Hungary. To this end, the most important international and Hungarian surveys were first reviewed; especially their methods and results. A more detailed analysis was carried out on the basis of the European Social Survey. Until 2014, a positive trend could be observed across the whole of Europe, including Hungary, but as a result of the refugee crisis, this changed radically. In 2016, Hungary again became the second-most opposing country of all those that participated in the ESS survey in all three surveyed years. In Hungary, attitudes towards immigrants and refugees took a negative turn for all social groups examined. According to average values, those with up to secondary school education, living in large towns or small villages or on farms are most rejective toward immigrants and refugee. It should be added, however, that attitudes are not shaped by real, interpersonal experiences, as by international comparison (and in absolute terms) there are very few recognised refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection in Hungary.

## 1. Introduction

Although it may seem to the lay observer that attitudes towards immigrants or refugees are a one-way nexus (the opinion of the majority society about newcomers), they are in fact an indicator of a more complex phenomenon. The theory of social cohesion has become popular in social science research since the late 1990s.<sup>1</sup> In the simplest and shortest terms, it is a cementing material that holds societies together and is also an important precondition for social and economic prosperity.<sup>2</sup> According to Jenson, the strength of social relations, which includes interpersonal and intergroup contacts, as well as attitudes towards 'others' such as immigrants or refugees, is, in fact, an important pillar of social cohesion.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, integration itself is a two-way process that

1 For a review of the literature, see for example: David Schiefer D. and Jolanda van der Noll. 2017: The Essentials of Social Cohesion: A Literature Review, *Social Indicators Research*, 132. évf. 2. sz. pp. 579-603.

2 See e.g.: Dragolov, Georgi et al. 2013: [Social Cohesion Radar: Measuring common ground. An International comparison of social cohesion](#). Gutersloh: Bertelsmann Foundation.; Fermin, Alfons · Kjellstrand, Sara 2005: [Study on immigration, integration and social cohesion](#). Final Report. European Commission, Employment and Social Affairs DG, 157 p.

3 Jane Jenson: *Defining and measuring social cohesion*. United Nations Research Institute for Social Development and Commonwealth Secretariat, 2010, London.

requires efforts from both the individual and the host society. After all, it is useless for a person to be ready to integrate if the host environment does not support him or her in this process. Monitoring social attitudes is therefore as essential for the successful integration of immigrants and refugees as assessing the housing, education, health or labour market situation. The list of indicators, compiled by the Migration Policy Group and consisting of a total of 168 items, was intended to assess and make comparable the integration of beneficiaries of international protection in Europe. Although the indicators developed by the [National Integration Evaluation Mechanism](#) (NIEM) project cover 13 integration areas, no information is collected on the views of the host society.

It is therefore worth reviewing recent international and Hungarian surveys examining attitudes towards refugees, what questions did they use, and finally, what conclusion did they reach. When comparing the Hungarian and European data series and their changes over time, in particular the situation before and after the refugee crisis, and then the differences are analysed according to the main social groups, we can get closer to answering how social attitudes towards refugees have developed in Hungary.

## 2. Previous surveys

### 2.1. Global level

Although at first glance it seems to be a rather subjective and difficult concept to grasp, attitude surveys have a decades-long history with solid methodological foundations. With representative sampling and standardised questionnaires, data from various countries become comparable and trends can be tracked both spatially and over time. In recent years, attitudes towards immigrants and refugees have been examined in several global, European and Hungarian surveys. Starting from the highest level, the [World Values Survey](#) (WVS) is one of the most comprehensive surveys that examines the economic, social, political, religious, and cultural values of people in different parts of the world (World Values Survey Association, Vienna, Austria; in Hungary, data was first collected by Szonda Ipsos Media, Opinion and Market Research Institute, and later by the Data Collection Department of Tárki Zrt.) The latest, seventh wave of the WVS included a question related to refugees: respondents could either agree or disagree with the following statement “asylum should be granted to political refugees persecuted elsewhere”.<sup>4</sup> However, the seventh wave did not cover Hungary.

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<sup>4</sup> 2017-2021 World Values Survey Wave 7, Master Survey Questionnaire

A worldwide survey is also conducted by the [Pew Research Centre](#), a U.S.-based think tank organisation. Attitudes towards refugees were measured in their 2016 (19 countries), 2017 (38 countries) and 2018 (27 countries) polls, and Hungary was included in the list of selected countries on all three occasions with 1005, 944 and 1002 respondents, respectively. The 2016 survey was the most detailed one, with a variety of questions such as supporting or opposing the reception of Iraqi and Syrian refugees, and the fear of them, attitudes towards the government's policies regarding refugees, terrorism and crime, and the burden this has on their respective country. After 2016, the questions changed, and their number also decreased. Some of these results will be presented below. The Pew Research Centre also publishes policy analyses regularly. One analysis, which dealt specifically with Hungary, highlighted that although Hungarians agree with European democratic principles, they are less tolerant of immigrants and refugees than the international average.<sup>5</sup>

## 2.2. European level

The 2017 survey of the European Values Study, closely related to the World Values Survey, has already been conducted in Hungary (with 1513 respondents), but the questions asked did not specifically cover refugees, only immigrants (*EVS – coordinator Tilburg University, The Netherlands; data collection in Hungary was first carried out by the Szonda Ipsos Media, Opinion and Market Research Institute, and later by Forsense Market Research and Strategic Consulting Ltd.*)<sup>6</sup> The Standard Eurobarometer is a survey conducted by the European Commission since 1974, they are conducted twice a year: in spring and in autumn. The research is being carried out at the request and under the coordination of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Communication. The Member States of the European Union take part in it, with around a thousand people interviewed per country.<sup>7</sup> According to the Standard Barometers, the Hungarian population considers immigration to be a greater threat to the European Union and to itself than the EU average. In 2017, 60% of Hungarian respondents said that immigration was one of the two most pressing problems affecting the EU, compared to the EU average of 38%.<sup>8</sup> Questions specifically related to refugees were included in two surveys: in Autumn 2017 and Autumn 2018. The question asked was as

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<sup>5</sup> [www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/09/30/hungarians-share-europes-embrace-of-democratic-principles-but-are-less-tolerant-of-refugees-minorities](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/09/30/hungarians-share-europes-embrace-of-democratic-principles-but-are-less-tolerant-of-refugees-minorities)

<sup>6</sup> European Values Study 2017, Questionnaire, CAPI, Hungary

<sup>7</sup> [www.ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/General/index](http://www.ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/General/index)

<sup>8</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 87, Spring 2017, The key indicators, Hungary

follows: “To what extent do you agree with the statement that Hungary / EU28 should help refugees?” In 2017, 29% of the population thought they should help refugees, and by 2018, that figure had risen to 31%. However, both values are well below the EU average for the year (67% and 69% respectively) and are among the lowest together with Slovakia, Bulgaria and the Czech Republic.<sup>9</sup>

Also noteworthy is the *European Social Survey (ESS European Research Infrastructure Consortium, London, UK)*, which monitors several ‘soft’ social indicators, such as community cohesion or subjective well-being, as well as attitudes towards immigrants and refugees. The surveys in Hungary are carried out by TÁRKI in cooperation with the Institute of Sociology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The results are published every two years; the latest data reflect the situation in 2018. Although the list of countries included in the study varies from year to year, 27 countries that have been on the list at least five times; In Hungary, for example, the survey was conducted on all nine occasions. There are six questions related to attitudes towards international migration, and since 2002, they have been included in all ESS surveys.<sup>10</sup> In 2002 and 2014, a special module on migration was added to the standard questionnaire, containing a total of 58 and 35 questions, respectively. However, there were far fewer questions about attitudes towards refugees in particular; seven in 2002, one in 2014, and three in 2016. Previous analyses based on the ESS database have shown that as a result of the migration crisis in Hungary, the rate of rejection of immigration and the fear of immigrants has increased in all social groups,<sup>11</sup> and a complete merger of the concepts of ‘immigrant’ and ‘refugee’ can also be observed.<sup>12</sup> In the latter, the inconsistent use of terms in the Hungarian media probably also played a significant role.

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9 Standard Eurobarometer 88, National Report, Survey in the European Union, Autumn 2017; Hungary Standard Eurobarometer 90, National Report, Public Opinion Survey in the European Union, Autumn 2018, Hungary

10 Allow many/few immigrants of the same race/ethnic group as the majority, Allow many/few immigrants of different race/ethnic group from the majority, Allow many/few immigrants from poorer countries outside Europe, Immigration bad or good for country's economy, Country's cultural life undermined or enriched by immigrants, Immigrants make the country worse or better place to live

11 Messing, Vera - Ságvári, Bence: *Still divided, but more open: Mapping European attitudes towards migration before and after the migration crisis*. Budapest, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2019.

12 Messing, Vera - Ságvári, Bence: *Looking behind the culture of fear. Cross-national analysis of attitudes towards migration*. Budapest, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2018.



## 2.3. Hungarian survey

Among the Hungarian surveys, it is important to mention the research of TÁRKI (“Omnibus Social Policy Attitudes among the Adult Population in Hungary”), with a sample of around a thousand, which measures attitudes towards immigrants and ‘foreigners’ annually, sometimes several times a year. Questions are related to the reception of refugees depending on the country of origin and the reason for fleeing, the refugee policy and the concerns in connection with the refugee population. TÁRKI’s analyses also confirm previous findings: The proportion of xenophobes has increased in Hungary (15% in 1992, but jumped to 53% in 2016)<sup>13</sup>, and significant differences in willingness to reception can be observed depending on the reason for fleeing. Family reunification is the most accepted reason, while the persecution for following the Islamic religion and the escape of unemployment are the least accepted.<sup>14</sup> Mention should also be made of the opinion polls of the Migration Research Institute and Századvég, based on which, it seems that the Hungarian population rejects the EU quota system<sup>15</sup> and according to the majority of the population refugees arriving in Hungary are actually ‘economic migrants’.<sup>16</sup>

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13 Sík Endre - Simonovits Bori - Szeitl Blanka. Az idegenellenesség alakulása és a bevándorlással kapcsolatos félelmek Magyarországon és a visegrádi országokban. REGIO. *Kisebbség Kultúra Politika Társadalom*, 2016, 24(2), 81-108.

14 Simonovits Bori - Szeitl Blanka. Menekültekkel és migrációs politikával kapcsolatos attitűdök Magyarországon és nemzetközi összehasonlításban. *Társadalmi Riport*, 2016, 420-440.

15 [www.szazadveg.hu/hu/kutatasok/az-alapitvany-kutatasi/piackutatas-kozvelemeny-kutatas/a-tobbseg-a-menekultugyi-kvotarendszer-ellen](http://www.szazadveg.hu/hu/kutatasok/az-alapitvany-kutatasi/piackutatas-kozvelemeny-kutatas/a-tobbseg-a-menekultugyi-kvotarendszer-ellen); [www.szazadveg.hu/hu/hirek/a-magyar-lakossag-elutasitja-az-europai-parlament-kozos-unios-menekultugyi-rendszer-reformjara-vonatkozo-javaslatat](http://www.szazadveg.hu/hu/hirek/a-magyar-lakossag-elutasitja-az-europai-parlament-kozos-unios-menekultugyi-rendszer-reformjara-vonatkozo-javaslatat)

16 [www.migraciokutato.hu/2016/09/20/kozvelemenykutatás-sorozat-a-migráció-társadalmi-megítéléseiről-iv](http://www.migraciokutato.hu/2016/09/20/kozvelemenykutatás-sorozat-a-migráció-társadalmi-megítéléseiről-iv)

**Table 1.** Recent surveys partly focusing on attitudes towards refugees in Hungary.

Survey	Year	Sample (HU)	Questions / statements concerning refugees
European Social Survey	2002	1685	<p>To what extent do you agree with the statement that your country has more than its fair share of people applying for refugee status?</p> <p>To what extent do you agree with the statement that governments should be generous assessing applications for refugee status?</p> <p>To what extent do you agree with the statement that most refugee applicants are not in real fear of persecution in their own countries?</p> <p>To what extent do you agree with the statement that people applying for refugee status should be allowed to work while their cases are considered?</p> <p>To what extent do you agree with the statement that refugee applicants should be kept in detention centres while their cases are considered?</p> <p>To what extent do you agree with the statement that financial support should be provided to refugee applicants while their cases are considered?</p> <p>To what extent do you agree with the statement that granted refugees should be entitled to bring close family members?</p>
	2014	1698	<p>To what extent do you agree with the statement that governments should be generous assessing applications for refugee status?</p> <p>To what extent do you agree with the statement that most refugee applicants are not in real fear of persecution in their own countries?</p> <p>To what extent do you agree with the statement that granted refugees should be entitled to bring close family members?</p>
	2016	1614	<p>To what extent do you agree with the statement that governments should be generous assessing applications for refugee status?</p>

<b>Pew Research Center</b>	2016	1005	<p>Do you think that the large number of refugees leaving countries like Syria and Iraq poses a major threat, minor threat, or no threat at all to your country?</p> <p>Do refugees increase the chances of terrorism in your country?</p> <p>Can refugees be blamed for crime in the country rather than other groups?</p> <p>Do refugees make the country stronger through their talents and work or do they burden the country?</p> <p>Do you agree with the way Prime Minister Viktor Orbán handles the refugee issue?</p> <p>Do you agree with the European Union's approach to the refugees?</p>
	2017	944	<p>Do you think that the large number of refugees leaving countries like Syria and Iraq poses a major threat, minor threat, or no threat at all to your country?</p> <p>In your opinion, should we accommodate more, fewer or the same number of refugees as at present?</p> <p>Do you agree with the European Union's approach to the refugees?</p>
	2018	1002	<p>Would you oppose or support the reception of refugees from countries from which people are fleeing war or violence?</p> <p>Do you agree with the European Union's approach to the refugees?</p>
<b>Standard Euro-</b>	2017	1000	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement that your country should help refugees?
	2018	1000	To what extent do you agree with the statement that Hungary / EU28 should help refugees?

<p><b>TÁRKI (Omni- busz)</b></p>	<p>every year, several times a year</p>	<p>1000-1500</p>	<p>In your opinion, Hungary should receive (all refugees, no-one, some refugees)?</p> <p>In your opinion, out of all asylum applicants ... (ethnic groups specified) should be received?</p> <p>Do you think refugees should be recognised who ... (types by reasons of escape)?</p> <p>To what extent do you think that refugees are a threat to Europe?</p> <p>To what extent do you think that black African or Arab refugees should not be granted asylum here, even in exceptional cases?</p> <p>To what extent do you think that the care of the masses of refugees could jeopardize the social benefits of those who live here?</p> <p>Have you met a refugee or an immigrant in Hungary in the last 12 months?</p> <p>To what extent do you agree with the following statements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seeing the great number of undocumented refugees and migrants entering Hungary without control makes me worried.</li> <li>• Please think about the whole of Europe. Seeing the great number of undocumented refugees and migrants entering Europe without control makes me worried.</li> <li>• Seeing the arrival of refugees and migrants to Hungary of cultures and religions that are different from ours makes me worried.</li> <li>• Please think about the whole of Europe. Seeing the arrival of refugees and migrants of cultures and religions that are different from ours makes me worried.</li> </ul> <p>How much do you agree with the following measure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making the control of the Hungarian borders stricter.</li> <li>• Introducing a law that would make it compulsory for migrants to respect fundamental Hungarian values</li> <li>• Controlling the number of refugees arriving in Hungary by setting an upper limit.?</li> <li>• More money should be allocated for the integration of refugees and immigrants living in Hungary (ie for housing, education, language?)<sup>17</sup></li> </ul>
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Source: own compilation

<sup>17</sup> The questions are not included in every survey and their number varies.

## 3. Changes in social attitudes towards refugees in Hungary

### 3.1. Attitude around the turn of the millennium

The present analysis relies primarily on the European Social Survey database, supplemented in some places by the results of the Pew Research Centre and TÁRKI. One of the reasons for this is that attitudes towards refugees have already been addressed in the first wave of the ESS European Social Survey in 2002 (22 countries, 1,685 Hungarian respondents). This is optimal as a starting point, as it can also be used to observe a longer-term trend, not just the effects of the 2015 refugee crisis. (That year, according to the Central Statistical Office, 6,412 asylum seekers arrived in Hungary, and the countries of origin were primarily Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iraq and the successor states of Yugoslavia.)<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, it is considered to be the largest and methodologically best database in Europe, which is indeed suitable for comparative analyses in both space and time. There are about 30-40 thousand respondents in a survey. In addition, the ESS is the only international survey that provides data broken down not only at national but also at regional and sometimes even at county level.

According to the 2002 ESS data, the averages of the Hungarian responses alone do not suggest a negative attitude towards refugees, they are rather moderate, neutral values.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, a comparison with the other countries examined shows that the population in Hungary is more reluctant to accept measures to support refugees (**Figure 1**). (Although the methodological acceptability of averaging is not clear due to ordinal data<sup>20</sup>, this is often used in literature to compare countries and certain social groups.<sup>21</sup>)

A particularly strong negative attitude was observed concerning two issues. According to Hungarians, most asylum seekers are not in real danger and are not being persecuted; 60% of respondents fully agreed or agreed with this statement, in contrast to, for example, Sweden at the other end of the ranking, where only 21% thought so. 16% of the Hungarian respondents were com-

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<sup>18</sup> [www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xftp/stattukor/nemzvand.pdf](http://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xftp/stattukor/nemzvand.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> The analysis does not include the *don't know* the answers and those who did not answer the question.

<sup>20</sup> A qualitative scale on which the order of the categories can be determined, but the distance between the units measured on the scale is not uniform; see school grades. The ordinal scales included in the research are also Likert scales (e.g., how much they agree with the statements between 1 and 5), which is used in most cases as metric data. From a purely theoretical, mathematical point of view, averaging is not recommended, but it makes sense in practice, so it is also often used in comparative studies in social science research.

<sup>21</sup> Analysis of mode and median values would not show differences in all cases.

pletely opposed to the idea of applicants receiving financial support during the processing of their asylum application; a higher proportion was observed only in Belgium and France. Nearly two-thirds of Hungarian respondents thought that, compared to the size and economic strength of the country, more refugee applications were received by Hungary than adequate. It is interesting to compare this with the 2002 UNHCR data series, which shows that Hungary was ranked 95th in the world in terms of refugees to GDP ratio, 95th in terms of per thousand inhabitants, and 73rd in terms of ratio per thousand km<sup>2</sup>.<sup>22</sup> So, considering the capacities, far fewer refugees arrived in Hungary than in Sweden or Denmark, where the population considered the number of refugees arriving fair.

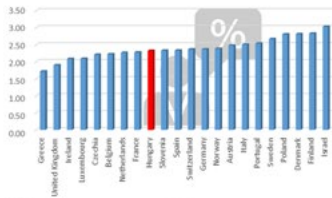
It is worth adding to the above that in 2002, TÁRKI measured the proportion of xenophobes at 40%, which is an extremely high value compared to the data measured in the early 1990s. This jump may be explained by the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and its link to the Middle East, but it does not explain why, in an international comparison, the rejection of refugees is significant in Hungary (according to the ESS), as it was not one of the typical destination countries of asylum seekers even in 2002. These examples demonstrate that social attitude is not shaped by objective facts but by their subjective perception.

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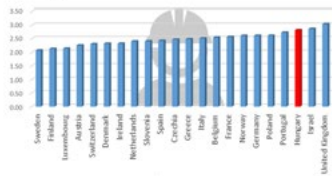
<sup>22</sup> [www.unhcr.org/41206f7a7.html](http://www.unhcr.org/41206f7a7.html)

**Figure 1.** European comparison of response averages regarding refugees.

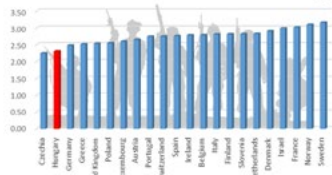
1: strongly agree, 5: strongly disagree. Source: ESS (2002)



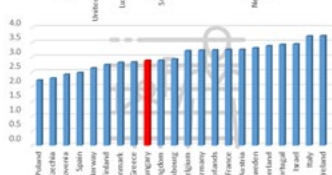
**Country has more than its fair share of people applying refugee status**



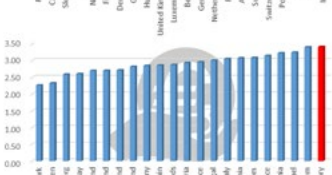
**People applying refugee status allowed to work while cases considered**



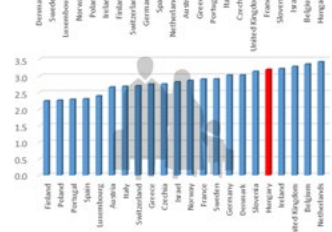
**Most refugee applicants not in real fear of persecution own countries**



**Refugee applicants kept in detention centres while cases considered**



**Financial support to refugee applicants while cases considered**



**Granted refugees should be entitled to bring close family members**

Source: ESS (2002)

## 3.2. Changes until 2014 and then until 2016 in Europe and Hungary

The ESS waves in 2014 (21 countries, 1,698 Hungarian respondents) and then in 2016 (23 countries, 1,614 Hungarian respondents) contained questions on refugees, which were as follows:

- ▶ governments should be generous assessing applications for refugee status;
- ▶ that most refugee applicants are not in real fear of persecution in their own countries;
- ▶ granted refugees should be entitled to family reunification (bringing close family members).

However, due to an error, the last two questions were omitted from the Hungarian questionnaire in 2016,<sup>23</sup> thus, a single statement remained, the change over time of which could be analysed between 2002, 2014, and 2016: “governments should be generous judging applications for refugee status”. Respondents were able to express their opinion on a Likert scale between strongly agree (1) and strongly disagree (5).<sup>24</sup> In 2002, the average Hungarian response was already the second highest after the Netherlands, so, the majority of respondents rejected a more tolerant assessment of refugee applications. By 2014, the average values had declined, while the proportion of those who fully agreed or agreed with the statement increased from 12% to 23%. So, in line with the European trends, the general attitude towards refugees has shifted in a positive direction. By 2016, this has changed radically: Among the countries that were on the ESS list in all three years, the Hungarian average jumped the most (**Table 1**), while the share of those in support of a generous assessment of refugee status decreased from 23% to 14%. The proportion of completely negative respondents stands out by far in Hungary and the Czech Republic (40% and 39%, respectively) compared to the other countries. The TÁRKI time series entitled “Proportion of xenophobes, xenophiles and those undecided, 1992–2016 (%)” also coincides with this.<sup>25</sup> The proportion of xenophobes decreased from 40% in October 2002 to 39% in 2014,<sup>26</sup> which indicates a more modest decline compared to the findings of the European Social Survey. At the same time, by 2016, similarly to the ESS, TÁRKI also measured a drastic increase: the proportion of xenophobes reached a record of 53%.

<sup>23</sup> [www.europeansocialsurvey.org/data/deviations\\_country.html?year=2016&land=348](http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/data/deviations_country.html?year=2016&land=348)

<sup>24</sup> In Hungary, 95.1% of answers to this question was valid.

<sup>25</sup> [www.tarki.hu/hu/news/2016/kitekint/20160404\\_idegen.html](http://www.tarki.hu/hu/news/2016/kitekint/20160404_idegen.html)

<sup>26</sup> Enyedi Zsolt, Fábrián Zoltán és Sik Endre: Nöttek-e az előítéletek Magyarországon? in Kolosi Tamás Tóth István György - Vukovich György (szerk.) *Társadalmi Riport 2004*, Budapest, TÁRKI, 2004, 375–399.



**Table 1.** „Averages of responses to this statement „governments should be generous judging applications for refugee status”.

1: strongly agree, 5: strongly disagree.

Blue values: negative attitude change, yellow values: positive attitude change

	2002	2004	2016	2014-2016
Austria	3.21	2.96	3.3	+0.34
Belgium	3.53	3.23	3.26	+0.03
Czech Republic	3.68	3.37	3.96	+0.59
United Kingdom	3.25	2.77	2.64	-0.13
Finland	3.02	2.63	2.89	+0.26
France	2.43	2.43	2.58	+0.15
The Netherlands	3.8	3.17	3.65	+0.48
Ireland	2.63	2.55	2.52	-0.03
Israel	3.04	3.4	3.44	+0.04
Poland	2.45	2.36	2.72	+0.36
Hungary	3.7	3.23	3.89	+0.66
Germany	3.63	2.94	3.29	+0.35
Norway	3.25	2.51	2.59	+0.08
Portugal	2.51	2.26	2.26	0
Spain	2.67	2.43	2.39	-0.04
Switzerland	3.35	3.01	2.98	-0.03
Sweden	2.8	2.38	2.61	+0.23
Slovenia	3.37	2.84	3.2	+0.36

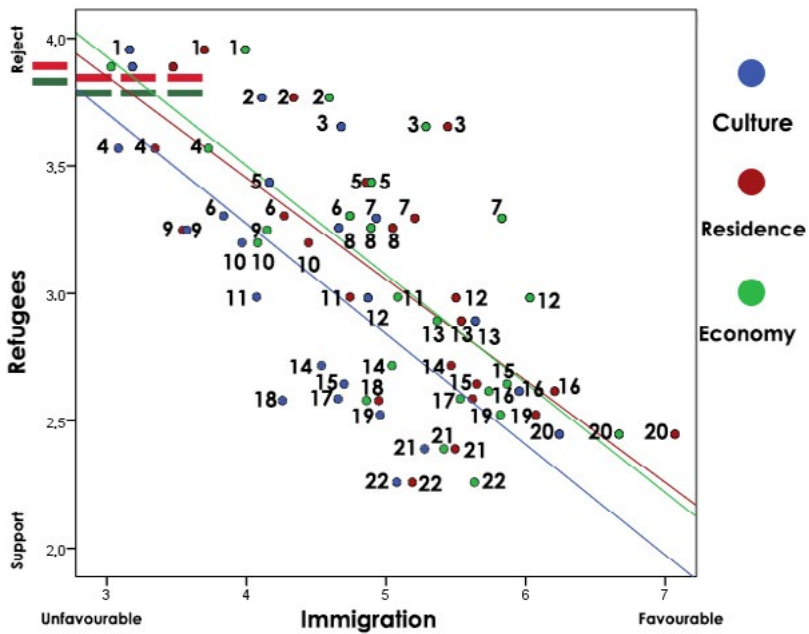
Source: ESS (2002), ESS (2014), ESS (2016)

### 3.3. Immigrants and refugees: are opinions similar or different?

Does a negative attitude towards refugees go hand in hand with a rejection of immigration, or do these two fall under different ‘treatment’? Based on the trend lines in **Figure 2**, it is clear that these two correlate in a European context. ESS countries are indicated by individual dots, while the y-axis of the chart shows the averages of the statement “governments should be generous assessing applications for refugee status” and the x-axis shows the averages of three immigration questions (the impact of immigration on the country’s culture, the quality of life, and economy). The correlation seems particularly

strong in the case of Hungary, where the rejection attitude towards both refugees and immigrants is strong, although the question did not define from which country the migrants were from (they could be Austrians or Canadians). This is another evidence that, as a result of the refugee crisis and the accompanying governmental communication, the concepts of 'refugee' and 'migrant' have become blurred for many in Hungary. However, the relationship is not so clear everywhere. Portuguese respondents, for example, are more tolerant of refugees than other migrants, but the opposite is true in the Netherlands: immigration is supported more than the reception of refugees.

**Figure 2.** Relationship between refugee and immigrant issues, average of European countries.

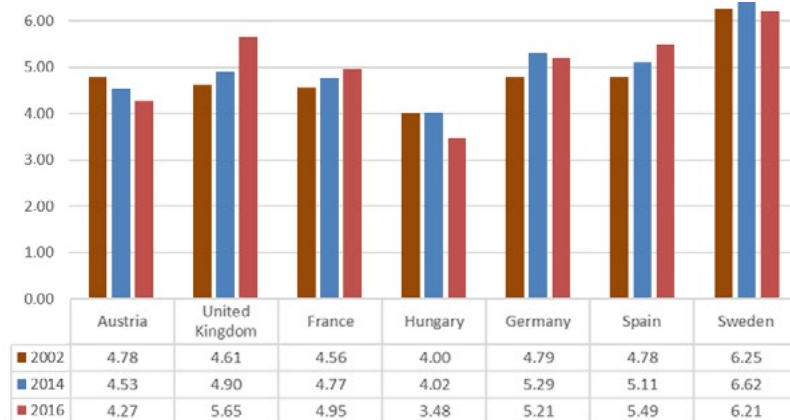


Countries other than Hungary are numbered: 1-Czech Republic, 2-Estonia, 3-Netherlands, 4-Russia, 5-Israel, 6-Austria, 7-Germany, 8-Belgium, 9-Italy, 10-Slovenia, 11-Lithuania, 12-Switzerland, 13- Finland, 14-Poland, 15-United Kingdom, 16-Sweden, 17-Norway, 18-France, 19-Ireland, 20-Iceland, 21-Spain, 22-Portugal

Thus, in the case of Hungary, there seems to be no significant difference between the attitudes towards refugees and migrants.<sup>27</sup> This is an important finding, as there is significantly more information available about the population's views on immigration than purely about attitudes towards refugees. It is therefore worth examining the changes of opinions on immigration in the broadest sense after 2002, as they certainly also closely approximate the dynamics of changes in attitudes towards refugees.

What do we think about the effects of immigration? Will this make our country a better or worse place in the long run? Between 2002 and 2014, there was first a slight increase and then a significant decrease in the average values of the responses in Hungary (this is a comparable trend to the refugee-related trends described earlier), which is a similar trend to Germany and Sweden, but at much lower averages, of course. Interestingly, in Europe, quite different patterns emerge in this regard; In Austria, for example, the results are increasingly unfavourable, while in Spain, France and the United Kingdom the results are increasingly favourable.

**Figure 3.** Changes in the impact of immigration on the country as a place of residence



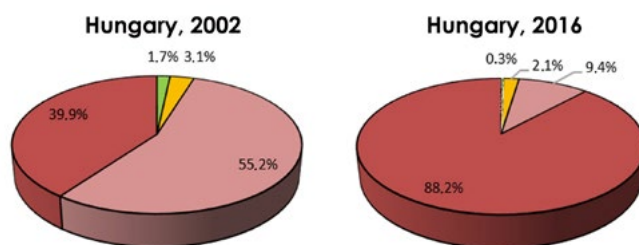
Forrás: ESS (2002), ESS (2014), ESS (2016).

27 However, there is a difference in where the refugee comes from. According to the 2015 TÁRKI survey, 94% of the population rejects Arab refugees, but many also oppose the reception of Chinese, Arabs or Africans. The least people reject Hungarians living abroad (7%). See in: Görbe Attiláné dr. Zán Krisztina: Hazai xenofóbia-kutatások. In Christián László (szerk.) *Rendészettudományi kutatások: Az NKE Rendészettudományi Kutatóműhely tanulmánykötete*, Dialóg Campus Kiadó, Budapest, 2017, 63-71.

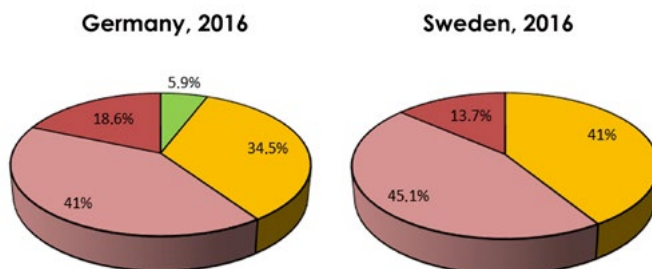
If there is little data available on attitudes towards refugees, a review of opinions on ‘immigration from poorer countries outside Europe’ seems, as a kind of approximation, particularly promising. Although those rejecting and opposing it were in majority already in 2002, their proportion increased further by 2016. (Data not shown from the 2014 survey are between these two, but are already shifting towards a large amount of ‘none’ responses). It seems that the Hungarian population clearly identifies immigrants from poorer countries outside Europe as refugees. It is therefore not surprising that almost 90% of those who completely reject the generous assessment of asylum applications do not want to see migrants from poor countries outside Europe in Hungary. 62% of the Hungarian respondents answered this way, which is an extreme result compared to the other countries. In a European context, however, the situation is less clear. In Western and Northern Europe, such as Germany or Sweden, even among those who explicitly reject refugees, there are many who would keep national borders open to immigrants from poorer countries outside Europe (**Figure 4**). As Messing and SÁgvári (2019) point out, the gap between Hungary and other EU countries is difficult to explain. In addition to government communication, it may be due to the high homogeneity of the population and the low number of immigrants, resulting in a lack of interpersonal and intergroup contacts and experience, as well as the low level of social cohesion and trust in Hungarian society.<sup>28</sup>

**Figure 4.** Proportion of answers to the question “Would you admit few or many immigrants from poorer countries outside Europe?” among those who otherwise completely reject the generous assessment of refugee applications.

Green: a lot, yellow: some, red: a few, burgundy: none.



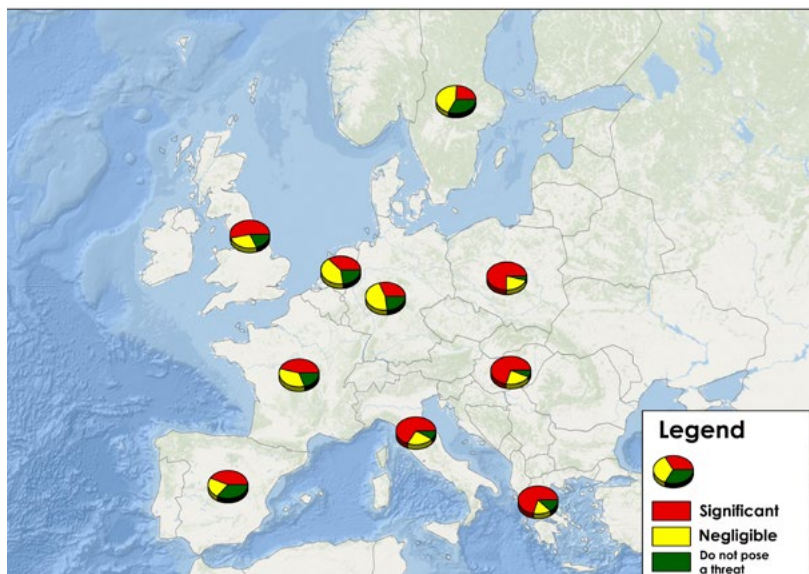
<sup>28</sup> Messing, Vera - SÁgvári, Bence. *Still divided, but more open: Mapping European attitudes towards migration before and after the migration crisis*, Budapest, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2019.



Source: ESS (2016)

Another source, the Pew Research Centre's 2016 and 2017 surveys specify some non-European countries. The majority of Hungarian respondents (70% and 67%) consider refugees from Iraq and Syria to be a particularly serious threat. However, this view is not unique, as there are even higher values for Greece and Poland. In light of this, it is not surprising that the rate of "no threat" responses (6%) is also lower than in other European countries, for example, 38% in Spain. Three-quarters of Hungarian respondents approved the government's asylum policy, while four-fifths said refugees would increase the risk of terrorist incidents. The proportion of those who think that refugees would only be a burden for Hungary is even higher (84%). These represent the highest values among the European countries surveyed by the Pew Research Centre. At the same time, when it comes specifically to "refugees leaving their homes due to war or violence," far fewer reject them, although they are still in the 53% majority, according to the 2018 survey. This is the second-highest value after Israel, double the Greek percentage, and four times the German value.

**Figure 5.** Proportion of answers to questions „In your opinion, how much of a threat do refugees from Iraq and Syria pose to your country?“ in Europe



Source: Pew Research Centre (2016)

### 3.4. Attitude differences between the various social groups

For policy decision-making, it is also important to know whether there are significant differences in attitudes towards refugees among certain groups in society. Based on the ESS database, it can be concluded that although small differences can be detected, they are not significant (Figure 6). This is especially true for gender, although between 2014 and 2016, the average response values of women deteriorated to a greater extent. Interestingly, however, the unemployed proved to be somewhat more lenient about the generous assessment of asylum applications than respondents in employment who are presumably more concerned about losing their job. Those who agree with the generous assessment of the asylum application are found in the smallest proportion in the age group of 31-50 years. Those with higher education and those living in suburban areas are the least against immigration, while people with secondary school education and especially those living in small villages and large urban areas object to it the most.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Proportion of answers to questions „In your opinion, how much of a threat do refugees from Iraq and Syria pose to your country?“ in Europe

The cross-tabulation analysis based on education and settlement type clearly showed that those with tertiary education living in the suburbs had a relatively positive attitude (average: 2.73), while those with a maximum of eight years of primary school living in small villages or homesteads had a negative attitude. (Average: 4.27).

Thus, between 2014 and 2018, the values deteriorated in Hungary in almost all examined segments. Messing and Ságvári found the same when examining the values of the ‘rejection index’ they created. In their analysis, in contrast to Hungarian values, in Spain, Portugal, Ireland and the United Kingdom, rejection decreased somewhat in all segments, whereas in Austria only certain groups became more disapproving, not society as a whole.<sup>30</sup>

**Figure 6.** Averages of Hungarian responses to the statement “The government should be generous in its assessment of asylum applications”, according to level of education, employment, gender, age and place of residence.



Source: ESS (2016). In the figure, higher values indicate higher rejection.

30 Messing, V., and Ságvári, B. Still divided, but more open: Mapping European attitudes towards migration before and after the migration crisis. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Budapest, 2019.

## 4. Summary

Monitoring attitudes towards immigration and refugees has recently been undertaken by several international projects, but these mostly run independently and in parallel, and generally focused on different issues. While this broadens the perspective, it does not allow for monitoring change over time and for direct comparison. At the same time, the West-East dichotomy seems obvious: take any result line, the attitudes of the population of Central and South-Eastern European countries are generally considerably more negative towards refugees.

The most detailed of the European polls was the 2002 wave of the European Social Survey, which also included seven questions specifically related to refugees. When asked whether the government should assess refugee applications generously, proportionally, the second most negative answers were received in Hungary. Until 2014, a positive trend could be observed for the whole of Europe, including Hungary, but as a result of the refugee crisis, this changed radically. In 2016, Hungary again became the second most opposing country among those that participated in the ESS survey in all three surveyed years.

As there is considerably more detailed information on the population's opinion on immigration, the question arises as to whether these can be used in the future, as a kind of approximate indicator, to better understand the dynamics of changes in attitudes towards refugees. The answer is yes, as, with a few exceptions (e.g. Portugal or the Netherlands), values strongly correlate at both European and Hungarian level, especially concerning 'migrants from poorer countries outside Europe'. Thus, it is not surprising, that the vast majority of Hungarians who completely reject the generous assessment of asylum applications would not accept any immigrants from outside Europe. (At the same time, it also indicates that the concepts of refugee and immigrant have largely blurred and that a negative attitude towards one group also triggers rejection towards another.)

In Hungary, attitudes towards immigrants and refugees took a negative turn between 2014 and 2016 for all social groups examined. According to average values, those with up to secondary education, living in large towns or small villages or on homesteads are most xenophobic. As those with jobs represent higher rates of rejection, there is also a fear of losing their job. It should be added, however, that attitudes are not shaped by real, interpersonal experiences, as in international comparison (and in absolute terms) there are very few recognised refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection in Hungary, so, most people may have never met any. The media probably played a more important role in this.



If a country decides to recognise some asylum seekers and allow them to settle permanently and acquire citizenship, successful integration will be in the common interest, as it will contribute to reducing potential ethnic, religious and cultural tensions and to strengthening social cohesion. Hungary also belongs to this group, even if the number of recognised refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection is significantly lower than in most Western or Northern European countries.

## 5. Policy recommendations

Contact theory, as it is known in sociology literature, is based on the idea that social cohesion can be strengthened through interactions and contacts between groups; otherwise, prejudices and fears tend to determine its weakening.<sup>31</sup> Experience has shown that the places where these relations are built are schools and workplaces, so it is recommended to promote the participation of recognised refugees in education and in the labour market. Of course, it is not realistic that those living in small settlements with lower average educational attainment (the most xenophobic group) can form a personal relationship with them, but based on the so-called 'extended contact theory', 'indirect friendships' (an acquaintance who has a friend of another ethnicity) and even intergroup relationships in cyberspace can have an effect on increasing individual trust levels.<sup>32</sup> Thus, if refugees are portrayed in a more nuanced way, it can already contribute to a positive change in attitudes and, indirectly, to the strengthening of social trust and cohesion: objectively about the causes and possible effects of the phenomenon, without taboos on the issues of most concern to the majority society (such as Islamic radicalism) and on the personal destiny and goals of refugees and their families.

The most important recommendation for Hungarian and international opinion polls is that it would be worthwhile to place more emphasis on monitoring the attitude towards refugees and beneficiaries of international protection. Opinions of host societies on immigrants have long been an integral part of these surveys, but it would be useful to examine the two in parallel, even based on identical questions. An in-depth, comparative study of international polls that are conducted parallelly with somewhat different methodologies

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<sup>31</sup> Allport, Gordon W. *The nature of prejudice*, Cambridge/Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1954, 576 p.

<sup>32</sup> Stephen C. Wright, Arthur Aron, Tracy McLaughlin-Volpe, and Stacy A. Ropp: The extended contact effect: Knowledge of cross-group friendships and prejudice. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 73(1), 1997. pp. 73-90

would be key for social researchers.<sup>33</sup> Last but not least, as integration is a two-way process that requires effort from both the individual and the host society, and requires mutual openness and acceptance, it would also be necessary to assess and monitor the attitudes of immigrants and refugees.

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<sup>33</sup> In the UK, for example, although the [ESS](#), [Ipsos MORI](#) and [the British Election Study](#) all observed a similar trend, there is a not negligible difference in the change in the proportion of people who reject immigration.