

SELF-HELPING REFUGEES? THE ROLE OF ORGANISATIONS OF BENEFICIARIES OF INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION AND IMMIGRANTS IN HUNGARY

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

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**Social Integration of Beneficiaries of International Protection in Hungary
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Executive summary

This analysis examines the possible further development of NIEM indicators that focus on building bridges, i.e. the relationship between beneficiaries of international protection or other groups with an immigrant background and local society. These indicators are currently analysed primarily on national processes that are focused on institutions. As in Hungary, these processes are often difficult to reconcile with the objectives of the European Union, the role of local initiatives and grassroots NGOs will increase.

The present analysis explores how bottom-up, informal processes could be assessed. To do this, it first presents the context related to the indicators of the first stage, then briefly discusses some theoretical considerations regarding the processes of the second stage. Finally, based on interviews and the literature, it outlines some possible indicators that could complement NIEM's current indicator system for bridge-building.

1. Indicator system of building bridges in Hungary

The [National Integration Evaluation Mechanism](#) (NIEM) project aims to examine aspects that are important for the integration of beneficiaries of international and to make the situation in each country measurable¹. In this context, it uses a total of 13 groups of indicators that examine the integration of the target group. One of these is the so-called 'building bridges' indicator system, which focuses on the relationship between beneficiaries of international protection or other immigrant backgrounds and local society. The NIEM project defines two stages: the first step is to disseminate information on the public policy framework and make the groups of beneficiaries of international protection and local society accept them, while the second step is the application and implementation of public policy (and the European recommendations).

As the Hungarian Government has radically changed the regulations and political environment related to refugees and immigration over the past five years, this analysis focuses primarily on the second stage. The government has gradually phased out all the previously targeted support provided to groups of beneficiaries of international protection in Hungary and has created an uncertain legal environment through intensive and rapidly changing legislative work. Furthermore, in political communication, the government increasingly portrayed groups of immigrants and refugees in a negative light.²

1 Wolffhardt, Alexander – Conte, Carmine – Huddleston, Thomas: *The European benchmark for refugee integration: A comparative analysis of the National Integration Evaluation Mechanism in 14 EU countries* (No. 1 ez: Evaluation 1: Comprehensive Report. Brussels, Migration Policy Group – Warsaw, Institute of Public Affairs, 2020.

2 Tóth Judit: Szerkesztői előszó. *Korszakhatáron, avagy búcsú a menedékkijogtól. Állam- és jogtudomány*, Vol. 60, 2019/4, 3–10.

Thus, the state, in its function providing the conditions for integration, is now strongly questionable and the role of civic initiatives and self-help gain in importance in the integration process. At the same time, the Hungarian government blocked EU funds available through the State Refugee, Migration and Integration Fund (MMIA) related to refugee assistance from non-governmental organisations. And with the Act on Foreign Funded Organisations, by taxing subsidies from abroad and the negative portrayal of refugee support activities³ it has made the work of many organisations significantly more difficult.⁴

These processes make it clear that no significant change can be expected concerning the indicators measuring the first stage compared to the previous period. In other words, we have to look for different patterns of refugee assistance at the level of local governments, church and non-governmental organisations, as well as various informal groups and strategies. As the central government represents a public policy that is less compatible with human rights and humanitarian objectives, the importance of self-help, social base building and community cooperation has clearly increased.

The present analysis explores how bottom-up, informal processes could be assessed. To do this, it first presents the context related to the indicators of the first stage, then briefly discusses some theoretical considerations regarding the processes of the second stage, finally, based on interviews and the literature, it outlines some possible indicators that could complement NIEM's current indicator system for bridge-building.

As the purpose of this analysis is to supplement and revise the NIEM indicators, it provides a general overview. It relies primarily on reviewing the literature, analysing the websites and documents of relevant organisations, and the resources available online, as well as some expert interviews.

Regarding literature, it seeks to explore previous experiences with the participation of refugees, examines the more recent literature on refugee assistance, and also draws on the literature on civic organisations. The interviews were conducted with organisations and experts examining and assisting refugees and their self-help activities. These are summarised in the present analysis.

³ See for example: [Bognár, Éva – Sik, Endre – Surányi, Ráchel: The case of Hungary—De Wilde goes wild](#), CEASEVAL report, 2018

⁴ Szabó Attila: A menekültek integrációjának ellehetetlenítése Magyarországon 2015–2018 között. *Állam- és jogtudomány*, Vol. 60, 2019/4, 88–104. The European Commission declared Act LXXVI of 2017 on the *Transparency of Foreign-Funded Organizations* in breach of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and the European Charter of Fundamental Rights in June 2020 following an action brought by the European Commission and upheld the Commission's action to initiate infringement proceedings.

2. The first step in 'building bridges': The national context

As the introduction has already shown, the institutional environment in Hungary for beneficiaries of international protection is contradictory. One reason for this is that government policies before and after 2015 are contradictory. In connection with 'persons granted international protection, stateless persons and persons residing in Hungary with a view to settling permanently'⁵ the Hungarian government drew up the so-called Migration Strategy in 2013, which is the Strategic Plan connected to the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) for the 2014–2020 financial period.⁶ This document, in addition to being a condition for using the resources made available to AMIF by the European Union,⁷ serves two purposes. Its primary goal is to define the tasks related to asylum and immigration arising from the obligations and expectations of the European Union in such a way that the interests of Hungary is also considered. However, this document already includes elements that place the European Union directives in a framework of interpretation that is more in line with Hungary's position on refugees, which in many cases contradicts the EU directives.

This is indicated by the fact that the document, in addition to making a distinction between legal and illegal migration, focuses on the prevention of 'economic immigration' and other elements that have appeared in public discourse in the 2015 government campaign linking terrorism and migration.⁸

That is the reason why, since the change of direction in 2015, this document can only be treated with reservations as the basis for a strategy on migration and refugees. This is also suggested by the fact that although the document contains a plan to develop a separate Integration Strategy, it has not been completed so far. Thus, instead of the strategic document, we are likely to get a more accurate picture of the government's intention based on the communication emerging in 2015 and beyond, and on Hungary's position regarding asylum adjusted to this.⁹

5 See: The Migration Strategy adopted by Government Decree 1698/2013 (X. 4) and the seven-year strategic [planning document](#) related to the Asylum and Migration Fund to be established by the European Union in the 2014-2020 financial period.

6 www.belugyalapok.hu/alapok/sites/default/files/MMIA.pdf

7 See [Regulation \(EU\) No 514/2014](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council.

8 Bognár – Sik – Surányi: i.m.

9 This process fits in very well with the public policy-making process indicated by Illés and Körösnéyi. The authors argue that the creation of Hungarian public policy by the second or third Orbán government is not really an ideology-driven process (at most at its very abstract level), rather, specific measures, often ad hoc or reactive, outlined based on individual issues, become the basis for subsequent, ideologically justified public policies. Illés Gábor István – Körösnéyi András: Ortodoxia, heterodoxia és cselekvés: Bajnai Gordon és Orbán Viktor válságkezelése, 2009–2014. In Körösnéyi András (szerk.): *Viharban kormányozni: Politikai vezetők válsághelyzetekben*. Budapest, MTA Társadalomtudományi Kutatóközpont Politikatudományi Intézet, 2019, 139–166.

The document acknowledges that integration is a two-way process¹⁰, i.e. requires the active participation of both the host society and refugee groups, moreover, it addresses the need for appropriate procedures and the provision of basic information to both beneficiaries of international protection and the host society. However, the public policies pursued are often in sharp contrast to the findings of the document.

The Migration Strategy and the current NIEM indicator system basically emphasise two elements of this two-way process.

- ▶ Firstly, the importance of the attitudes that underpin an inclusive society. According to AMIF, awareness-raising campaigns and dissemination of information are severely missing in Hungary. However, it is sufficient to examine the main analyses of government communication on migration to see that it does not reinforce integration but presents immigration as a major challenge, links it to terrorism, and leads to the emergence of xenophobia.¹¹
- ▶ Secondly, the involvement of beneficiaries of international protection and their advocacy groups in decision-making about them. The related objectives include the creation of an Integration Forum, where the advocacy groups of the target group can also express their views. the creation of an Integration Forum, where the interest groups of the target group can also express their views. "To increase the social and political activity of third-country nationals, to help them to exercise the political rights granted to them in the Fundamental Law more actively and to take an active part in Hungarian social life."

The institutions and documents listed in the Migration Strategy, such as the Integration Strategy, the Integration Forum, support for intercultural education, programs to support the entry into the labour market of third-country students in higher education, etc., have not been established to date. An even more severe problem from the point of view of the analysis is the fact that the interest representation of the target group is basically absent, and participatory activities are significantly hampered by hostile attitudes and political communication concerning refugees.

¹⁰ See footnote 5.

¹¹ Bíró-Nagy András: Politikai lottóötös: a migráció jelentősége a magyar politikában, 2014–2018. In *Várakozások és valóságok. Parlamenti választás 2018*, Budapest, Napvilág Kiadó – MTA Társadalomtudományi Kutatóközpont Politikatudományi Intézet, 2018, 269–291.; [Messing, Vera – Ságvári, Bence: Looking behind the culture of fear. Cross-national analysis of attitudes towards migration](#), Bonn, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2018.; Gerő, Márton, – Sik, Endre: The Moral Panic Button: Construction and consequences. In Gozdziaik, Elzbieta M. – Main, Izabella – Suter, Brigitte (eds.): *Europe and the Refugee Response. A Crisis of Values?* London, Routledge, 2020, 39–58.

It is important to mention that, in parallel with the general narrative against immigration and refugees, some measures point in the opposite direction. One is the support of specific groups of refugees, such as the eviction of hundreds of Venezuelan citizens with Hungarian ancestry from Venezuela and the program for their reception, which was carried out with strong government commitment and significant resources,¹² and programs to help and receive persecuted Christians.¹³ These programs provide assistance to local communities in crisis regions and offer scholarships to members of persecuted Christian communities. The government established a special state secretariat and agency in 2017 with the mandate to help persecuted Christians.¹⁴ The programs help members of groups with a particular profile, e.g. persons who are related to Hungary based on origin (such as the Venezuelan group) or whose religious affiliation is the basis for eligibility.

The other set of measures refers to migration issues and policies that are not framed by the government as immigration but are discussed in a different interpretation framework. For example, the Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship, which supported over 9,000 third-country students to study in Hungary in 2019.¹⁵ And there are various seasonal agricultural jobs and major investments employing guest workers from neighbouring countries, and even though it impacts the labour market, the government communication does not launch campaigns to protect jobs. Of course, in parallel with the so-called refugee crisis and the governmental and social reactions to it, the situation of refugees in the public discourse concerning social sciences, public life and policies has become a significant topic in Hungary and all over Europe, both from political and state organisational aspects, and there has been an increased interest in the topic in the civil sphere. In addition to the authorities dealing with refugees and immigrants (Immigration Office, National Directorate General for Alien Policing, etc.) and non-governmental organisations (e.g. Menedék – Hungarian Association for Migrants, Next Step Association / formerly MigHelp / etc.), new movements assisting refugees have emerged (MigSzol, Migration Aid), some of which became formal organisations, some continued to operate as informal groups. In addition, actors have entered the field of refugee assistance, that did not work in this area before, or only

¹² See: [Földes András: Több száz venezuelait fogadott be titokban a kormány, de nem fizet bevándorlási különadót. Index, 2019.](#)

¹³ www.hungaryhelps.gov.hu/hungary-helps-agency

¹⁴ www.2015-2019.kormany.hu/hu/miniszterelnokseg/az-uldozott-keresztenyek-megsegiteseert-es-a-hungary-helps-program-megvalositasaert-felelos-allamtitkar/azbej-tristan-es-http://hungaryhelps.gov.hu/vezetes/

¹⁵ See [relevant statistics](#) of the Tempus Public Foundation

to a limited extent: the Central European University has launched an educational program for people with refugee backgrounds, and several churches or church-related organisations have extended their activities to refugees and immigrants. Based on our experience, in Hungary, the discourse on the integration of refugees and the organisational background aimed at helping them take place almost entirely with the initiative, coordination and participation of members of the majority society. As the majority of institutionalised organisations engaged in refugee assistance are run by Hungarian citizens, the literature also focuses on this aspect.¹⁶

The first question is what exceptions can we find, or at least where is it possible for refugees to be not only passive participants but also active shapers of the process?

This is important partly because any marginalised, disadvantaged group can only be effectively supported by involving the group itself, regardless of whether the assistance is provided by national or international governmental bodies or by civil society organisations.¹⁷

On the other hand, one of the key elements in dealing with difficult situations is the social resources available to members of the marginalised group (social capital, networking, entrepreneurship, etc.).¹⁸ Some of these can be created from the outside (such as access to the institutional system), but the most effective ways to accumulate these resources include different forms of self-help groups.

Thirdly, the literature on refugees itself points out that, contrary to popular beliefs, there is a high proportion of people with internal resources, motivations and entrepreneurial skills. At the same time, while immigrants appear to be more entrepreneurial, their participation in NGOs is lower than in the case of locals.¹⁹

Thus, the question arises as to what extent the assistance of refugees can be built upon the self-help organisations of persons with a refugee or immigrant background?

¹⁶ Feischmidt, Margit – Pries, Ludger – Celine Cantat (eds.): *Refugee Protection and Civil Society in Europe*. Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

¹⁷ Shucksmith, Mark: Endogenous Development, Social Capital and Social Inclusion: Perspectives from LEADER in the UK. *Sociologia Ruralis*, Vol. 40, 2000/2, 208–218.

¹⁸ Füzér Katalin – Gerő Márton – Sik Endre – Zongor Gábor: *A társadalmi tőke növelésének lehetőségei fejlesztéspolitikai eszközökkel*. Fejlesztéspolitika társadalmi hatásai 4. Budapest, TÁRKI, 2005

¹⁹ Kováts András: Bevándorlók integrációja Magyarországon korábbi kutatások adatai alapján. In Kováts András (szerk.): *Bevándorlás és integráció – Magyarországi adatok, európai indikátorok*, Budapest, MTA Társadalomtudományi Kutatóközpont Kisebbségkutató Intézet, 2013, 25.

This brief analysis cannot clearly answer this question, but it can suggest what factors can be used to create indicators to answer. This is a particularly important task as the measurement of the integration framework approaches the issue primarily from the point of view of state public policy and the attitudes of the majority society while focusing less on the conditions under which the active participation of refugee groups in the integration process can be ensured.

3. Refugees, immigrants and civic participation in Hungary

The 'participation' of refugees in local communities may refer to labour market integration or participation in the local community's informal network. Of course, the question is how newcomers can integrate into the above areas in the longer term. Traditional refugee assistance (social work, volunteering in refugee organisations) reproduces hierarchical relationships in which the low status of refugees may be conserved.²⁰

The system of equal relations can be created by forms of engagement that are based on the active participation and initiative of refugees. Examples include participation in NGOs and movements. These refer to unpaid activities in formal or informal organisations that are independent of governmental-state organisations in their decision-making structure, are joined voluntarily, may be registered or informal organisations and have the purpose of collective action (and thus the representation of a group), or is intended for the production of some public good. Of course, this public good may be limited in the case of club-like associations, but it may also be aimed at improving the living conditions of a wider group.²¹

Several forms of civic participation are possible: the first is voluntary work; tasks performed without financial compensation for a non-governmental organisation, a church or even a state institution. In the case of immigrants, the motivation for volunteering can be, on the one hand, interaction with the local community, learning the language and the acquisition of new skills, and, on the other hand, volunteering is also seen as a bridge to paid work.²² However, the impact of volunteering seems twofold. Tomlinson sees the positive impact

20 Hynie, Michaela: Refugee integration: Research and policy. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, Vol. 24, 2018/3, 265.

21 Anheier, Helmut K.: *Civil Society: Measurement, Evaluation, Policy*. London, CIVICUS Earthscan Publications, 2004.; Diani, Mario: *The Cement of Civil Society: Studying Networks in Localities*. Cambridge University Press, 2015.

22 Tomlinson, Frances: Marking Difference and Negotiating Belonging: Refugee Women, Volunteering and Employment. *Gender, Work & Organization*, Vol. 17, 2010/3, 278–296.

of volunteering on job opportunities as partly evidenced, but Vickers²³ points out that the ‘promise’ of getting a paid job encourages refugees to pursue their own interest rather than strategies for collective action, thus, it may contribute to maintaining a hierarchy between refugees and members of the majority society.

Another option is to participate in the work of NGOs and movements as members or to create such organisations. International research shows that there are higher participation rates among migrants in this area²⁴, however, the Hungarian situation seems to suggest that organisations with a migrant background are established primarily on a cultural-ethnic basis, for cultural activities, and not for advocacy or political purposes.²⁵

As already mentioned, the civic participation of refugees is not a focus in the Hungarian literature on non-governmental organisations engaged in refugee assistance, as it describes organisations that help refugees and immigrants or organisations with migrant background in general.²⁶

Of course, in many cases, it is difficult to distinguish between groups dealing with refugees, those with a “refugee background” and those with a migrant background, especially in the case of groups who have been in Hungary for a long time or groups with unsettled status. However, only a few studies address the issue of how refugees participate in NGOs or in political participation processes. A study on the civic participation of migrant groups was conducted in 2005, however, it mainly focused on Chinese and Hungarian minorities from across the border.²⁷ This is no surprise, as pre-2015 immigration data suggest that these groups accounted for the majority of immigrants and, in fact, refugees in the 1990s.²⁸

23 Vickers, Tom: Opportunities and Limitations for Collective Resistance Arising from Volunteering by Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Northern England. *Critical Sociology*, Vol. 42, 2016/3, 437–454.

24 Morales, Laura – Giugni, Marco: Political Opportunities, Social Capital and the Political Inclusion of Immigrants in European Cities. In Morales, Laura – Giugni, Marco (eds.): *Social Capital, Political Participation and Migration in Europe. Making Multicultural Democracy Work?*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, 1–18.

25 Kováts 2010, i. m. 230-231

26 See e.g.: Feischmidt, Margit – Pries, Ludger – Celine Cantat i-m.

27 Sik, Endre – Zakariás, Ildikó: *Active Civic Participation of Immigrants in Hungary. Country Report prepared for the European research project POLITIS*. Oldenburg: Interdisciplinary Center for Education and Communication in Migration Processes, 2005.

28 Hárs Ágnes: *Migráció harmadik országokból a statisztikai adatok tükrében. In Örkény Antal – Székelyi Mária (szerk.): Az idegen Magyarország – Bevándorlók társadalmi integrációja*, ELTE Eötvös Kiadó, Budapest, 2010, 15.

Over the past decade, there have been some attempts to assess organisations with a refugee or migrant background.²⁹ While a 2008 survey found a total of 88 organisations run by migrants that were primarily located in Budapest,³⁰ a national survey identified some 150 such organisations a few years later.³¹ Most of these surveys focused on the nationality groups represented in these organisations. While the highest number of organisations in Budapest involved Hungarians from across the border, nationally, the organisations of the East Asian and Middle Eastern communities were the largest group. However, in order to understand civic and political participation and integration processes, it may be worthwhile to consider other dimensions in addition to ethnicity:

The organisations mentioned in the literature - apart from the national and ethnic background - are distinguished according to two important dimensions: in terms of activities as well as the circumstances and date of the migration.

When differentiated by activity, organisations can be divided into three categories. The first category includes advocacy groups. Ron és Crow³² define human rights organisations as “an organised, non-profit, and non-governmental group whose stated goal is to promote one or more of the principles articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its associated treaties”. For example, the Martin Luther King Association. Only Endre Sik and Ildikó Zakariás write about these organisations in their 2005 study but are mentioned more often in the literature in the context of advocacy.³³

The second category includes organisations providing various services to refugees and immigrants, and the third category organisations engaged in the coordination of cultural events. The objectives of the latter include increasing tolerance and strengthening multicultural communication, as well as strengthening the relationship between refugees and immigrants. Cultural organisations are primarily formed on a regional, ethnic-nationality or religious basis and are typically referred to as migrant organisations in the literature.³⁴

29 Kováts, 2010, i. m.; [Kováts András: Migráns szervezetek Magyarországon](#). Budapest, MTA Társadalomtudományi Kutatóközpont Kisebbségkutató Intézet, 2012.

30 Kováts 2010, i. m. 224

31 Kováts 2012, i. m. 9

32 Ron, James – Crow, David: Who Trusts Local Human Rights Organizations?: Evidence from Three World Regions. *Human Rights Quarterly*, Vol. 37, 2015/1, 188.

33 Gerő Márton – Fonyó Attila: Szektor, alszektor vagy nem szektor? Jogvédelemmel foglalkozó civil szervezetek kapcsolathálózatainak elemzése. *Socio.hu*, 2013/1, 34–60.; Szabó Máté: A katakombákból a professzionalizmus felé: a jogvédő civil szervezetek helyzete Magyarországon a rendszerváltás után. *Fundamentum*, Vol. 1, 1997/2, 124–127.

34 See: Kováts 2012, i. m.

Church and religious organisations can play an important role in the integration of refugees. For example, organisations affiliated to the Greek or Orthodox Church or Muslim organisations, which are primarily engaged in religious activities, but immigrant groups are likely to come into their sight.³⁵

As described above, the other, partly-related dimension relates to the circumstances and time of migration. Although civic participation appears to be typically low among migrants,³⁶ participation rates may be higher for persons having lived in Hungary for a longer period who no longer have refugee status, dealing with people from similar backgrounds (Chinese, Iranian, Syrian, Hungarians across the border).³⁷ These are primarily cultural associations focusing on maintaining traditions.

Advocacy and social assistance organisations support newly arrived migrants and refugees. As civic participation is even less typical for newly arrived refugees and immigrants, in this case, too, normally former migrants or refugees run the organisation, and some newcomers might be involved in the work.

4. What happened to migrant organisations?

In general, the question of how the population of migrant organisations has evolved is not answered here, as this would require a repeat of the 2012 research. However, by examining some of the organisations named in the previous literature and expert interviews, we can draw attention to some trends.

The number of advocacy organisations with a immigrant background was quite low: reference is made to the Martin Luther King Association, Liberty House Foundation, the Albert Schweitzer Association of Refugees and the Mahatma Gandhi Human Rights Organisation, as well as the Centre for Defence of Human Rights (MEJOK Foundation). In the register of NGOs, by searching for the terms 'refugee', 'migrant/immigration', 14 organisations are listed, and this includes the organisational groups of the majority society. (e.g. Menedék Association or the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union). The search is illustrative; for example, the Hungarian Helsinki Committee is not included in the results, as the short description in the court register does not include a term related to migration, even though it is one of the most important organisations dealing with migration. Of the 15 organisations, only four operate in 2020. Seven

³⁵ See: Kováts 2012, i. m.

³⁶ Kováts 2012, i. m.

³⁷ Sik – Zakariás 2005, i. m.

terminated their operation after 2010, one in 2003 and one in 1991. The Migrant Solidarity Group (MigSzolg), set up in 2010 but not registered as a formal organisation, played a significant role in facilitating political participation related to refugees until about 2015-2016.³⁸

Social assistance organisations are also mentioned less in the literature, even though assistance itself has clearly come to the fore in recent years in the context of the refugee crisis. Expert interviews mentioned some organisations that provide some form of administrative assistance or social services. Of the organisations set up by refugees that were mentioned in the interviews, the Next Step Association, established in 2009, is the largest that helps refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection with public administration, job search and hold related training courses.³⁹

Although it does not operate in the form of an association, Kalunba Nonprofit Szolgáltató Kft. provides housing-related assistance and language courses. Although little information is available about the organisation, essentially they only have a Facebook page, expert interviews confirmed that refugees and migrants are also involved in their work. Kalunba has close ties to the Reformed Church. In addition, the Sant'Egidio community provides assistance to refugees and there are groups in the Mandák House affiliated to the Lutheran Church that engage refugees.

The study of cultural and religious organisations is not the focus of this analysis. At the same time, it is important to point out that in the interviews only one or two organisations were mentioned, mainly helping African migrants that also deal with newly arrived refugees. The most significant trend was the lack of interaction between organisations of previously arrived refugees and migrants, ethnicity-based student organisations and refugee assistance organisations. According to expert interviews, there are three main reasons for this:

Persons with a migrant background who arrived earlier, before the 1990s, or in the 1990s may experience the arrival of new immigrants as a threat to their own position.

This is linked to the fact that organisations established on an ethnic-regional basis are often formed according to religious, political or ethnic groups. Thus, if newcomers belong to other groups, they cannot rely on the help of existing organisations. This is sometimes reflected in the fact that while refugees are often forced to leave their homeland for political reasons, these organisations often maintain a good relationship with their country's embassy.

³⁸ See: www.migszol.com

³⁹ See: www.mighelp.hu

These organisations are indeed often the first step in integrating newcomers, but this fact remains invisible to the NGOs, authorities, etc. of the majority society. Only issues that cannot be resolved by groups organised on an ethnic-cultural basis are referred to these organisations.

This is also important because the literature suggests that such ethnic-national organisations are the first step in the participatory process: this creates networks that provide an opportunity to discuss problems and issues, provide support for empowerment, and the process can begin in which migrants become a 'Claim-making' population, that is, a visible group, with well-identified (or articulated) interests.⁴⁰ In Hungary, there seems to be a lack of interaction between ethnic-based organisations that, in principle, promote this and organisations that generally represent refugees.

5. Factors determining individual participation

Based on the interviews, some important trends emerge about factors influencing individual participation, which also have a substantial impact on the composition of organisations. The vast majority of beneficiaries of international protection consider Hungary as a transit country, which also has a significant effect on participation: on the one hand, it is a small population, even considering those who arrived in Hungary a long time ago and stayed here, and were involved in assisting refugees. The interviews revealed that there are typically 1-2 such persons staying in Hungary and participate in non-governmental organisations.

On the other hand, the effort put into collective action and the risks involved seem to pay off only if participants envision a long-term future in that country. This also motivated the launch of MigSzol, when they started working with members of a group of refugees or asylum seekers, mostly of Afghan origin, who planned to stay in Hungary. The members of the initial group eventually left the country (partly due to the short-term ineffectiveness of the protest), but it was certainly an important motivation to start MigSzol, and for the members with refugee backgrounds who later stayed here.

Consequently, an organisation with a purely or largely immigrant background is very rare. It is much more common for some of the clients of an organisation to take part in the operation of the organisation. In the interviews, this trend was mostly mentioned in relation to organisations with a religious background, such as Kalunba and Sant'Egidio. The Mandák House, maintained by

⁴⁰ Kemp, Adriana – Rajzman, Rebeca – Resnik, Julia – Gesser, Silvina Schammah: Contesting the limits of political participation: Latinos and black African migrant workers in Israel. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 23, 2000/1, 94–119.

the Lutheran Association of Józsefváros, also houses refugee and migrant organisations. Similarly, in the case of the Olive education program⁴¹, former students with refugee backgrounds later became involved as trainers or organisers.

6. The positive impact of participation on integration

Although the number of people involved in political, civic or voluntary activity is low, based on the interviews it appears that it can have significant benefits. These benefits essentially coincide with what the literature briefly described above considers to be the potential benefits of participating in the work of an NGO or in collective action:

- ▶ **(a.)** The network of contacts of asylum seekers will be more extensive and heterogeneous: in the case of non-governmental organisations there are often already Hungarian members, and in the case of protest forms they can also find Hungarian supporters: *“Suddenly, because they (a group of refugees) dared to express their fears and channel them into action, they found alliances in European activists, NGOs.”* (Interview 1) In addition, the network and communication intensity within the refugee group will increase. It is important to note, that these stakeholders provide not only ‘instrumental’ help, but also emotional support when working together. Through this, their later quality of life can also improve.
- ▶ **(b.)** Asylum seekers will be better acquainted with the political system of the host country, the legislation applicable to them, and can develop their negotiation skills necessary for public administration. For example, refugees participating in MigSzol negotiate with the authorities through the organisation. To do this, local activists held special skills development training for them.
- ▶ **(c.)** This increases their confidence, their perception of being able to influence their environment. One of the beneficiaries of international protection put it this way, answering a question about the effects of participation: *“Not many people go to such places (where we met) or have lunch here. Participation gave me the strength to defend myself in the various asylum processes, to orient myself in Hungarian culture and to introduce myself to Hungarian culture. Not the other way around, but introduced myself.”*

⁴¹ Olive was launched as a program at Central European University in January 2016. Initially, the lecturers and students of the university took part in the program on a voluntary basis, but later it officially became the program of the institution. In this phase, they had a “University Preparation” program, which was a full-time year of preparing for university studies, and a Weekend program, which offers courses for those who are unable to participate in formal education. In 2018, CEU stopped the program, from then on, only the Weekend program has been offered, organised by [Open Education Nonprofit Kft.](#)

▶ **(d.)** They develop their communication and organisational skills:

- They can learn how to present themselves and communicate in a meeting.
- The preparation of weekly meetings and demonstrations develops planning and organisational skills.

In summary, these new relationships, skills and knowledge will help them find their feet and to integrate in the long run, even if they do not end up settling in Hungary. This was also the case with the Afghan refugee group that played a significant role in the establishment of MigSzol, whose members eventually left Hungary, but it seems that the contacts, skills and information acquired through their political participation may have played a significant role in their subsequent success in life.

7. Barriers to participation

In addition to the general context described above, four factors can be highlighted that can be an obstacle to civic and political participation and thus to integration:

▶ **(a.)** Smaller, mainly reactive public policies on the part of the government, which impose a disproportionate cost on those who wish to participate. For example, one interviewee reported a case where the response to a protest was a restriction on a travel allowance for asylum seekers, which made the communication between Hungarian participants, mainly from Budapest, and refugees difficult.

▶ **(b.)** In refugee assistance, there is an implicitly embedded hierarchical relationship between the helper and the assisted. This latent hierarchy is not only a consequence of the interdependence of the two parties but is also part of the self-justification of the helpers.⁴² This can be reinforced by the development of an 'asylum seeker' or 'assisted' identity in programs specifically for refugees.

▶ **(c.)** The intention to move on, which fundamentally influences the intentions to participate.

⁴² Feischmidt, Margit – Zakariás, Ildikó: How Migration Experience Affects the Acceptance and Active Support of Refugees? Philanthropy and Paid Work of Hungarian Migrants in the German Immigrant Service. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, Vol. 18, 2020/4, 481–497.; Hynie 2018, i. m. 272.

► **(d.)** Possibilities of perceived or actual retaliation related to refugee status. A political environment that becomes hostile and uses restrictive means poses particular risks to those who have or apply for refugee status, since a political action interpreted as a violation of the law can lead to the loss of refugee status. In part, this led to the termination of MigSzol's activities after 2016, as they did not want to jeopardise the status of persons involved in the organisation's activities. The answer to this situation was the strategy of reducing activity, 'staying under the radar'. „*With the adoption of new refugee assistance legislation, we have been 'blacklisted' by the state and felt threatened as there were several refugees among us and there was a danger that the procedure leading to the residence permit would be postponed, we felt we needed to step back.*" (Interview 2.)

It seems important that political participation changes the traditional, refugee-host relationship. This system of relationships is fundamentally hierarchical, with the host society providing resources to refugees who are forced into a passive role. This latent relationship often leads to a situation that not only the existing communication and institutional problems, but also the learned inertia reinforced by the system of relations acts as a barrier to integration processes.⁴³ Political and civic participation changes this relationship: refugees and members of the host society can become equal partners, participation can help prevent entrapment in the institutional system.⁴⁴

8. Possible indicators of civil and political participation of refugees

The indicators developed by NIEM focus primarily on the first stage of building bridges. There are two possible reasons for this: the first one is that the integration approach is fundamentally state-focused, and the second one is that it is easier to measure state public policies, legislative frameworks, institutional consultation mechanisms, and civic attitudes. Examination of participation indicators is hampered by mistrust and a high degree of mobility, i.e. it is difficult to access the target group. There are two ways to learn about participation data: Targeted interviews and surveys, including questions related to volunteering and civic activities, can be carried out by NGOs working with asylum seekers. An example of this is the Immigrant Citizens Survey, which surveyed immigrants in fifteen European cities about electoral turnout and trade union

⁴³ Hynie 2018, i. m.

⁴⁴ Morales – Giugni 2011, i. m.

and civic participation.⁴⁵ Respondents with an immigrant background can be selected from the European Social Survey's biennial database⁴⁶. There are few respondents per country, but there are enough respondents per region to be able to approximate the activities related to participation. The limitation of this method is that beneficiaries of international protection cannot directly be identified, only the wider group of immigrants, and also, there is no information on which country the respondent came from.

In Hungary, between the first (2002) and eighth (2016) waves of the ESS, there were a total of 255 people who were born in another country. This is 1.9% of the total 8-wave sample. While this alone is not sufficient to perform in-depth analyses, it may be suitable for detecting fundamental trends. For example, a simple linear regression may help to examine whether the political participation of people with an immigrant background changed between 2002 and 2016. In Hungary, this has not changed during this period.⁴⁷ Of course, participation is more interesting in comparison to the total population. In Hungary this varies, but even with a low number of items, it appears to be typically higher than in the total population. Furthermore, between 2002 and 2016, while a decrease can be observed among those born in Hungary, the trend among those born outside Hungary is more stagnant or possibly even increasing.

45 [Huddleston, Thomas – Dag Tjaden, Jasper. Immigrant Citizens Survey. How immigrants experience integration in 15 European Cities](#), Brussels, King Baudouin Foundation – Migration Policy Group, 2012.

46 The European Social Survey is an international series of research that aims to produce comparable cross-sectional and time series data on European countries. Therefore, countries participating in the ESS (these are subject to change) conduct a national questionnaire survey every two years, representative of the population over 15 years of age. Part of the survey questionnaire remains the same every time, while some parts change, allowing new topics to be examined. Hungary participated in all surveys. European Social Survey ERIC (ESS ERIC). *European Social Survey (ESS), Cumulative Data Wizard*. 2016

47 Political activity is measured by the ESS with the following items: Have you contacted a politician, government or local government representative? were you active in a political party? have you participated in the work of another political organisation or political movement? Have you worn or displayed campaign badge/sticker? Signed a letter of protest, a petition? Taken part in a public demonstration? Boycotted certain products? Deliberately bought certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons? Donated money to a political party or group? Participated in illegal protest activities? From these, a simple combined variable was created, where 0 indicated that the person did not participate and 1 indicated participation in any of them.

Table 1. The degree of political participation among those not born in Hungary and among the entire Hungarian population over 15 years of age, %, European Values Survey, 2002-2016

Year	Not born in Hungary	Sample size	Born in Hungary	Sample size
2002	17%	41	20%	1779
2004	16%	31	16%	1498
2006	31%	36	18%	1603
2008	10%	30	19%	1544
2010	27%	44	19%	1561
2013	20%	25	12%	2014
2015	26%	23	15%	1698
2016	35%	26	13%	1614

Data source: (European Social Survey ERIC /ESS ERIC/, 2016) own editing

Another difficulty is that NIEM only analyses the participatory environment based on national policies and campaigns. It is also advisable to carry out a more detailed analysis of the changes taking place in the given countries (see the issue of travel discount), but this requires the involvement of refugee support groups in the country, as these groups have experience with the impact of a measure. A separate task may be to explore the intentions behind each measure.

A further issue with the indicator system is that, as it focuses on the national level, individual and organisational variables are disregarded. At the organisational level, the number of registered and operational organisations engaged in refugee issues, as well as the registration of foundations and associations dealing with this topic in a given year, may show changes in the sensitivity to the topic in a given country. A good example of this is the number of human rights organisations dealing with refugees and the dynamics of their establishment and termination. Hungarian organisations most often ceased to exist after 2010, which, together with changes in public policy, suggests that in the past ten years, the work of refugee advocacy organisations has been made more difficult.

Finally, a survey of the composition of the members, with a systematic questionnaire every few years, could also provide an indication of the degree of involvement.

9. Policy recommendations

The above confirms that NGO participation has a decisively positive effect on the integration of refugees and strengthens the two-way integration processes. Therefore, the following recommendations can be made to policy-makers and NGOs:

For the central government:

- ▶ It is clearly recommended to shift towards a decentralised model of integration involving local actors to strengthen integration. In other words, the integration process should be financed from the national budget but implemented through local governments and non-governmental organisations.
- ▶ Monitoring the integration process should include measuring civic and political participation.
- ▶ It would be worthwhile to conduct separate research programs to learn about the processes described above.

For local governments and NGOs:

- ▶ In addition to individual social work/administration, strengthening refugee communities through local projects, organisational and community development tools.
- ▶ Educational programs that connect refugee groups and university students.
- ▶ Providing opportunities for volunteering and traineeships for refugees.
- ▶ Facilitating the relationship between organisations dealing with different 'generations' of immigrant by organising joint forums and programs.

For non-governmental organisations and research institutes also engaged in research:

- ▶ Collection and secondary analysis of research databases on the political and civic participation of refugees to identify local challenges.
- ▶ Launch of joint research projects with various academic organisations and refugees to identify barriers to NGO and political participation.
- ▶ Launch of citizen's science projects involving refugees and immigrant groups.

10. Summary

This brief analysis attempted to review potential new indicators that could help to assess the two-way integration processes of refugees. In doing so, I followed the logic of the indicator system provided by the National Integration Evaluation Mechanism project.

This system of indicators has two stages: it monitors national processes and the implementation of public policies. Since the indicators identified based on the first stage show no improvement, or perhaps even a negative shift, this analysis focused on the second stage. Within this, the extent to which refugees and immigrants are able to participate in shaping their own integration, through non-governmental organisations and political participation practices. An overview of previous relevant research is followed by mapping the current situation based on the literature and some interviews. One of the main findings of the analysis is that organisations engaged in advocacy and social activities are not affiliated with organisations involved in cultural activities. This, in turn, could severely hamper the emergence of groups with an immigrant background as an increasingly important political factor.

At the same time, civic and political participation brings significant benefits to members of groups with refugee background: as a result of expanding their network of contacts, new opportunities and learning new organisational skills, their quality of life may significantly improve later. In addition, civic participation changes the hierarchical nature of the helper-assisted relationship system and can be effective in developing active behaviour rather than passive roles.

Finally, the analysis also addressed the issue of applicable indicators and reviewed what indicators could be used to better understand the impact of civic and political participation. NIEM focuses primarily on state actors. Yet it is worth focusing on the informal sphere, refugee groups, and the organisations assisting them, either through survey-type tools or quantitative or interviews, primarily in countries where the relationship between the state and refugee-assisting NGOs is conflicting.