HUNGARY'S LONG SUMMER OF MIGRATION – irresponsible governance fails people seeking international protection
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In the summer of 2015, tens of thousands of people from violence- and poverty-torn countries crossed the border between Serbia and Hungary seeking international protection. In this report, we show that the so-called "refugee crisis" that ensued was the direct result of the inability and unwillingness of the Hungarian government under the nationalist-conservative Fidesz-party and Prime Minister Viktor Orbán to provide effective support to those affected. To this end, we, the Migrant Solidarity Group of Hungary, documented the experiences of people seeking international protection and then related those experiences to the increasingly restrictive political and legal context in Hungary.

The unique set of testimonies we collected through almost 50 in-depth interviews is of great political importance: While a lot has been written about the events of last summer, the majority of these accounts either provide a sterile chronological description, focus on the participation of Hungarian and international volunteers, or merely depict a snapshot of the experiences of people seeking protection. Yet, embedded analysis of the actual experiences of people who were transiting through Hungary is mostly missing. This is problematic and dangerous because these people are both the most vulnerable and the most aware of the effect of failing government policies. Thus their voices should be heeded more carefully in determining our shared responsibility to pursue basic human rights for a dignified life.

Our interviews focus on seven main themes and issues. We grouped them in the same way as they were shared with us by the people seeking international protection: 1) the transit-area at the Hungarian-Serbian border, 2) registration and forced fingerprinting, 3) detention and reception conditions, 4) translation and information, 5) minors, 6) medical care, and 7) trains and smugglers. Altogether, those themes provide a comprehensive account of how people seeking international protection experienced the workings and effects of the European and, in particular, Hungarian border regimes in the summer of 2015.
Our discussion zooms in on the following main points and issues:

• Many people described the transit area at the Hungarian-Serbian border as a “grey zone”, where crime was endemic and no protection available. This illustrates a main concern that emerges throughout the whole report, namely that the very people seeking international protection are time and again left helpless and alone, exposed to criminal activities in many different guises, and subjected to government regulations that are arbitrary at best and inhumane at worst.

• The experiences with registration and forced fingerprinting added to this concern: While some had their passports confiscated in order to force fingerprinting, others were allowed to go “wherever” without any interference from the authorities, or managed to pass the border without being fingerprinted at all. These testimonies, too, indicate the relative flexibility of authorities, which makes governmental regulations capricious because no coherent and clear policy is in place.

• The conditions of reception and detention in the camps, like Röszke, Vámosszabadi and Debrecen, were reported as extremely poor. Almost all people we spoke to described the hygienic situation as particularly dire and they all said that there was not enough space – which led many to sleep outdoors. Also, people mentioned that there was not enough food, and many important dietary products for babies and children were missing. Another severe problem was that many people did not know where they were and, above all, what was going to happen to them. The latter point also clearly illustrates the haphazard and chaotic response from the Hungarian state and the lack of communication with people seeking protection.

• Related to this is the point on translation and provision of information, which almost all the people we spoke with said were either non-existent or insufficient. Often, there was not even English translation available and the most important pieces of information were regularly presented only in Hungarian. Moreover, many people told us they actually had to sign official papers that they did not understand at all. This practice, as dangerous as it is legally questionable, increases the feeling of insecurity and helplessness of the people seeking international protection vis-à-vis governmental instructions.

• The treatment of unaccompanied minors is especially sensitive and important. Minors warrant the utmost support and protection. This makes the incidents of maltreatment we were informed about particularly troubling. Our interviews confirmed that authorities try to “upgrade” the age of minors so that they can be treated as grown-ups. This is a perilous practice that was reported to us by several Afghan boys who travelled without a passport. They were simply assigned a new birthday: January 1, 1997. As this made them 18 by the summer of 2015 and, hence, legally adult, they were deprived of the special protection guaranteed to minors during their asylum procedure and their deportation would be in “accordance with the law”.

• With regards to medical care, we found that there was no official support from the municipality or the government in the transit zones in Budapest. Instead, volunteer doctors stepped in and provided medical aid where the government failed to do so. Yet, unsurprisingly, they were severely limited in number, capacity and in equipment.

• Finally, regarding the possibility and means of transportation, we found that denying people from boarding the trains they had bought tickets for was one of the largest causes of anxiety, fear and bitterness. Particularly troubling is the strict policy of ethnic profiling through which such denials were carried out: those who “looked” like migrants were not allowed into Budapest’s train-stations. This denial also carried a significant financial loss. Many families lost hundreds of euro, given that getting refunds for the tickets turned out to be practically impossible. In turn, the impossibility of traveling by train created a vibrant market for smugglers, known as “taxis”. Thus, while the Hungarian government intentionally ignored their concerns, people seeking international protection were compelled to pay up to 1500 euro to continue their journey westwards.
Taken together, our interviews help us trace how the increasing criminalization of seeking protection in Hungary led to the emergency in the transit-zones in Budapest. This comes to show that the “refugee crisis” of last summer was neither inevitable nor surprising. Moreover, we demonstrate throughout this report that the actual crisis, namely irresponsible governance and xenophobic incitement, is entrenched in the government’s migration policies and the insistence to uphold the Dublin Regulation.

In fact, almost one year after the events in Hungary and Budapest caught international attention, this very crisis continues today. As a result, another humanitarian emergency is currently in the making, not only in the “transit-zones” at the Hungarian border but also within the country. In continuity with the developments we document in this report, the Hungarian government is (again) gradually suspending both asylum- and integration-support and thereby continues to fail people seeking international protection.

In light of the above, we hope that this detailed and uncompromised report provides a piece of evidence from the grassroots-level. We publish it in both Hungarian and English to inform local and international debate about the situation in Hungary and the inner workings and effects of the increasingly restrictive European border-regime. Our primary objective is to raise awareness and facilitate informed debate about the governmental policies that have triggered the crisis of the summer of 2015 as well as about what we can do to push for more responsible governance together.
1. Introduction

I. PEOPLE SEEKING INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

First and foremost, we are all people – not numbers or categories that try to define us and determine the reality of our lives. This is also why we prefer to speak of people, not migrants or refugees. As Migszol, we find those categories artificial and the distinction between them often arbitrary (even though – or because – we know the relevant stipulations in International law). More importantly, we also find it dangerous that those categories are oftentimes employed to treat people differently. Thus, we focus on the act of seeking international protection instead, which relates to a right that we believe should be open to everyone that seeks a better, more stable, healthy and also prosperous future. This, finally, helps us to address our shared responsibility to support one another, and also identify where and why this responsibility is so often violated, especially through governmental actors as we examine in this report.

II. A “REFUGEE CRISIS” OR A EUROPEAN CRISIS?

The unprecedented increase of people coming to Hungary in 2015 did pose (and continues to pose) an enormous challenge, not least with regard to the quality of reception and means of integration. In the eyes of many people in Hungary, this brings with it a number of difficulties that we also take very seriously. But Migszol rejects calling what happened a “refugee crisis”.

In the summer of 2015, tens of thousands of people from violence- and poverty-torn countries crossed the border between Serbia and Hungary seeking international protection (see clarification box I). In this report, we argue that the so-called “refugee crisis” that ensued was the direct result of the inability of the Hungarian government under the nationalist-conservative Fidesz-party and Prime Minister Viktor Orbán to provide effective support to those affected (for a comment on our use of the term crisis, and the many crises that are related to it, see box II). To this end, we document the experiences of people seeking international protection and relate those experiences to the increasingly restrictive political and legal context in Hungary.
Introduction

1.1. The Migrant Solidarity Group of Hungary (Migszol) is an informal, unregistered political grassroots organization. We, Hungarians and people that are new to the country, are working for an open and welcoming Hungary for all. The group was formed in 2012 when a large number of people predominantly from Afghanistan, later joined by a number of Hungarian and international friends and activists, started protesting against the lack of state support for recognized refugees and other flagrant flaws in the Hungarian asylum system. The protests were unsuccessful insofar as the protesters with refugee status did not get any government support. Yet, seeing them leave for Germany to re-apply for protection in the summer of 2013 motivated the people that stayed in Hungary to continue their activism. Over the years, Migszol has visited refugee camps, written blog posts, organized many demonstrations, and given Hungarian language classes. You can find more information about our philosophy and activities on our website: www.migszol.com.

This report documents why and how Hungary did not offer effective protection to people seeking asylum during the summer of 2015. Amidst the escalating course of events during those months, when nobody knew what was going to happen but so many different lives came together, we conducted a large number of interviews in the so-called “transit zones” that were established at Budapest’s main train stations. The primary idea behind this was to get a little closer to the people that are too often misrepresented in political discussions and the media, document the voices, experiences and rights violations of asylum-seekers in the Hungarian migration system, and thereby get a more complete understanding of what was happening.

Before going into detail, we introduce the group that authored this report and our reasons for writing it (sections 1.1 to 1.2). We then outline the Hungarian asylum policy (1.3) and examine the context behind the government’s xenophobic campaign, which began after the Charlie Hebdo attacks in January 2015 (1.4). In the second section, we identify the main element of the crisis of the summer in 2015, namely the increasing criminalization of seeking protection in Hungary, which led to the emergency in the transit-zones in Budapest. After we clarify the methodology of our research (3), the main part then documents the experiences we captured through the interviews we conducted (4). In particular, we focus on seven main themes to provide a comprehensive and detailed overview. Finally, the conclusion summarizes our main findings (5). We then close with a number of demands that we derive from our research. This is meant to highlight that the actual crisis, namely government irresponsibility and xenophobic incitement, is not over just because those that are negatively affected by it have disappeared from the public eye.

This is because this notion is oftentimes used to shift the focus away from the responsibility (and legal obligation) to support people seeking international protection. Instead, it is used to instigate fear of foreigners, posing “us” versus “them”, “Europe” versus “Islam” and a “normal time” versus “crisis time”. We want to highlight how problematic and hypocritical it is to talk about a “crisis” only when people are coming to Europe, but not as long as they stay in countries like Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iran or Pakistan that border conflict regions.

This is why, when we speak of a crisis, we first and foremost refer to the crisis for the people fleeing from existential hardships. For us, the biggest crisis is when their right to seek international protection, a human right that is recognized by international law, is not supported in any positive manner. Yet, this is what the Hungarian government has long been doing: Thus, as we document throughout this report, the actual crisis of the summer of 2015 is a crisis of governmental irresponsibility, xenophobic incitement and criminalization of seeking asylum. This is, in short, a crisis of governance in Hungary and the EU, and not of people seeking protection.

Solidarity and direct dialogue

The Migrant Solidarity Group of Hungary (Migszol) is an informal, unregistered political grassroots organization. We, Hungarians and people that are new to the country, are working for an open and welcoming Hungary for all. The group was formed in 2012 when a large number of people predominantly from Afghanistan, later joined by a number of Hungarian and international friends and activists, started protesting against the lack of state support for recognized refugees and other flagrant flaws in the Hungarian asylum system. The protests were unsuccessful insofar as the protesters with refugee status did not get any government support. Yet, seeing them leave for Germany to re-apply for protection in the summer of 2013 motivated the people that stayed in Hungary to continue their activism. Over the years, Migszol has visited refugee camps, written blog posts, organized many demonstrations, and given Hungarian language classes. You can find more information about our philosophy and activities on our website: www.migszol.com.

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As the government effectively made it impossible for anyone to apply for asylum in Hungary as of the 1st of August (for reasons we will explain in section 2), we also want to record why the deportation of people back...
to Hungary under the Dublin Regulation is unacceptable. This Regulation, which we oppose, has far-reaching consequences (see section 1.3 for more). For now, let us emphasize its main point, namely that the responsibility to receive people seeking international protection lies with the government of the country where they first entered the European Union (i.e. have their passports stamped and/or their fingerprints taken). As an external frontier of the EU, Hungary is in a particular position as regards the Dublin Regulation.

Yet, while the government has received millions of euro in support from the EU, it has by and large failed to fulfill its responsibility to process the asylum applications of people seeking international protection. We speak of people seeking international protection because we find categories like “economic migrants” and “political refugees” artificial, arbitrary and dangerous (see clarification box I above). As such, we take issue with government issued communication and media reporting that repeatedly fabricate those categories. In the most problematic case, this is done in order to “justify” why some rights are available to some but not granted to others. As the right to seek international protection is a crucial point in case, we refer to people to affirm our commonalities. Likewise, we reject manufactured differences that are used to define what some of us are allowed to be and do. Thus, we highlight the act of seeking international protection because we want to emphasize our shared responsibility to act towards people that flee from existential hardship, where violence and poverty are often inextricably related. To figure out what we can do together, we believe that having people speak for themselves is not only the best remedy against spreading categories of misrepresentation and exclusion. What is more, engaging in direct dialogue also helps to practice solidarity, which guides our work on this report.

People seeking international protection are not merely numbers, the aggregate of flows, or monolithic entities. They are all different and have their own stories. At some point, those stories might overlap, but each one of them is individually too important to miss, even when we can never capture them all. In our opinion, what actually matters are the individual reasons that people have to leave their home and pursue a better future; what matters are the fears and also many hopes and aspirations they have; and if we genuinely want to contribute to the resolution of any kind of crisis, collectively and in a humane way, what matters is that we recognize those feelings and address them without being intimidated and debilitated by governmental restrictions.

As a step in this direction, we seek to critically examine ourselves and the stereotypical ways in which we think again and again – even when we try to avoid it. And this, finally, helps us practice solidarity, not charity, the powerful political potential of which we can only harness together.
Towards this end, we want this report to be as widely accessible and intelligible as possible. At the same time, it is not journalistic. Rather, we consider it a central element of our work to be involved and engaged with the political environment. In this we don’t pretend to be “neutral” or “objective”: we are political and this commitment guides the work through which we try to reach the broader public, always independent from formal (parliamentary) politics, but mindful of the importance of working together (see clarification box III on what “political activism” means to us). As such, we are against racist and discriminatory practices and we believe that it is necessary and possible to change the current border regime, however incrementally, to make it more humane and inclusive (for what we mean by “border regime”, see clarification box IV). People seeking international protection, who take upon themselves the hardships of finding a better future, deserve all the support and solidarity we can muster, not isolationist, xenophobic reactions. Thus, we advocate for their active participation, together with Hungarians and other internationals, to ensure basic human rights. Unless those rights are indiscriminately applicable for all, they remain only privileges for some. To us, this means that those who have the privilege not to be affected by the current border regime should listen to those that are exposed to its negative and restrictive regulations. This is but one of the reasons that we are extremely concerned that in the autumn of 2015, Hungary de facto abolished its asylum system, thereby blocking people from one of the most basic, universal rights put up by international law: the right to seek international protection (see clarification box V for more on this).

The second reason we wrote this report is to offer an analysis of the lessons that can be learned from the experiences we managed to capture. To do so, we focus on the political context in which they unfolded. This helps to trace how social justice and basic rights are turned into a scarce commodity, the applicability of which is determined on nationalist grounds. In this way, we can better understand how economic and political problems, personal and political developments, but also individual and collective concerns and feelings are related and reinforce each other. This, then, helps...
V. INTERNATIONAL LAW AND THE RIGHT TO SEEK INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

The right to seek international protection is guaranteed by the Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951 and the amending Protocol of 1967. Such right is guaranteed to everyone who, according to Article 1 A (2), “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself to the protection of that country of his former residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it.”

The Geneva Convention confers certain rights to refugees that ought not to be violated. These contain:
- the principle of non-refoulement of the refugee (Article 33),
- the right not to be expelled (Article 32),
- the right not to be punished for illegal entry into the territory of a contracting state (Article 31),
- the right to work (Article 17 to 19),
- the right to housing (Article 21),
- the right to education (Article 22),
- the right to public relief and assistance (Article 23),
- the right to freedom of religion (Article 4),
- the right to access the courts (Article 16),
- the freedom of movement within the territory (Article 26) and the right to be issued identity and travel documents (Articles 27 and 28).

Furthermore, if the person does not qualify as refugee under the Geneva Convention, he or she can apply for subsidiary protection in the EU. Laid out in Council Directive 2004/83/EC of 29 April 2004 and Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011, a person is eligible for subsidiary protection if he or she faces serious harm if he or she were returned to his or her home country. Persons qualifying as bearers of subsidiary protection usually are conferred less rights than as bearers of the status of a refugee under the Geneva Convention.

Migszol is in a better position to do this than other organizations. This is because we are an independent and informal collective of activists that does not rely on having a good relationship with or accreditation from the government—which has led many other actors to abstain from getting involved, whether initially or altogether. Thus our group serves a mediating function by means of which we can help to bridge the government-imposed and -instigated restrictions, put people in touch with one another and cultivate the willingness to work towards a common goal. In this way, we can challenge the dominant, discriminatory political power structures together.
In this section we outline the main characteristics of the Hungarian asylum system before the changes of August 1 (for more detailed information, please check appendix 1). We also address the political climate in which the events of the summer of 2015 occurred. This will help us understand that the “refugee crisis” that unfolded was the direct result of the Hungarian government’s unwillingness to uphold its obligation to provide effective protection to people seeking asylum. This unwillingness was visible for years before the “crisis” started. In fact, the actual crisis was long in the making through policies that work towards exclusion rather than inclusion and incite xenophobia.

In past years, the Hungarian asylum policy has been characterized by a strict regime of detention and systematic absconsion. The regime of detention was briefly interrupted only in January 2013, after criticism from the European Commission, the Hungarian Helsinki Committee (HHC) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). For a short while, notorious detention centers such as Nyírbátor in north-eastern Hungary were turned into open camps. However, in the spring of 2013, the number of people seeking protection in Hungary increased sharply. As a result, detention for first-time asylum-seekers was reintroduced in July 2013. The HHC reports that over 40 percent of adult male first-time asylum-seekers were detained by April of 2014.

Reception conditions in both open and closed camps (immigration as well as asylum detention) have been known to be scandalously inadequate. After visiting and talking to people living in those camps, Migszol regularly wrote blog posts about the lack of medical care, insufficient quality of legal assistance, incessant bed bugs, overcrowding, malnutrition and lack of physical security that dramatically undermined people’s well-being.

Only nine percent of asylum-seekers were granted some form of protection in 2014, the lowest recognition rate in all of the EU. This low recognition rate was partly due to the fact that 80 to 90 percent of all the people coming to Hungary absconded and left to the west within a few days. Their reasons for leaving Hungary were certainly manifold: integration policies that work on paper but not in practice, symptomatic homelessness (which is criminalized in the Hungarian constitution) and poor employment prospects to name but a few.

While the Dublin Regulation has dramatic consequences for people seeking protection, regardless of whether they are deported or not, it has been largely ineffective with regard to Hungary. In 2014, Hungary received 7,961 requests for Dublin deportation, out of which only 827 resulted in a transfer, and between January 2014 and June 2015 only three to four percent of those originally registered here were sent back. The fact that the number of people crossing through Hungary continued to rise in 2015 made it ever more unrealistic to uphold the Dublin Regulation: while a total of
Introduction

- Déli train station
- II. János Pál pápa tér
- Keleti train station
- Nyugati train station
- Bicske
- Fót
- Balassagyarmat
- Liszt Ferenc International Airport
- Nyírbátor
- Debrecen
- Nagyfa
- Szeged train station
- Nagykanizsa
- Kiskunhalas
- Röszke
- Győr
- Vámosszabadi
- Martonfá
- Nagykanizsa

Transit Area
- Open Camp
- Community Shelter
- Asylum Detention
- Immigration Detention
42,777 people reached Hungary in 2014, an estimated number of 23,000 people came in the first few weeks of 2015 alone (many of them were from Kosovo). Throughout 2015, the government then voiced its refusal to accept Dublin deportees from other member states on multiple occasions, saying that Hungary had to shoulder a disproportionate burden. Given the dismal performance of Hungary to actually fulfil its responsibilities, this was as dubious as it was legally questionable. However, in November 2015, multiple court decisions from Germany, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Finland, Denmark, Luxembourg, Norway and Switzerland paused Dublin deportations to Hungary. Yet, there are still deportations back to Hungary under the Dublin regulation, which might lead to further deportation to Serbia (due to the 1st of August changes in the asylum law) and ensuing chain refoulement.

Immigration, especially from non-Trianon countries, was not a big issue in Hungarian politics until the end of 2014. Yet, by this time, the Fidesz-government faced a loss of popularity as corruption scandals, plans to introduce a tax on internet-traffic and other issues led to anti-government protests of different forms and sizes. While most of the civil opposition to Fidesz remained divided, the ultra-nationalist Jobbik party challenged the government from the far-right. By using the forged link between terrorism and migration, ever since the Charlie Hebdo attacks in France in January 2015, the Orbán government therefore started to distract public attention from internal policy failures and the ensuing emigration and brain drain of Hungarian youth. As a result, the official discourse on migration became markedly more hostile.

Viktor Orbán started linking “mass immigration” to terrorism and repeatedly called migrants a threat to Christianity and to “western civilization and culture” in his speeches. In April, the government went one step further and announced a national consultation on “immigration and terrorism”. This “consultation” was not actually an opinion poll. Instead, it was clearly designed to incite xenophobic sentiments, juxtaposing migrants against “traditional” Hungarian families. Only ten percent of the Hungarian population answered the national consultation. Yet, the authorities instrumentalized the results and stated that an “overwhelming majority” of respondents “agreed” on “the need for stricter border controls”. An equally xenophobic poster-campaign warning immigrants not to come to Hungary was launched in May. However, as the posters were in Hungarian, they were primarily supposed to appeal to domestic voters. Together, these developments set the stage for the even more extreme measures that the government took during the summer, which we will discuss next.
2. The crisis of the summer of 2015

While the government was spending double the amount it annually spends on refugee protection on the national consultation\textsuperscript{21}, more and more people seeking international protection were arriving in Hungary: in March, an average of about 200 people were registered per day; this number rose to about 400 in May and to 500 by June 17.\textsuperscript{22} On the latter date, and again using the results of the national consultation as a pretext, the government announced that it would declare Serbia a safe third country.\textsuperscript{23} and fence off the Hungarian border. What followed, nevertheless, was an increase in the number of people trying to reach Hungary before the fence was put in place.\textsuperscript{24} By the end of June, the daily number of people that were registered had risen to ca. 1000, and in the months that followed this number steadily increased to multiple thousands. On the 1st of August the legislation change came to effect, and Serbia was officially declared a safe third country. In light of the absence of a functioning asylum system in Serbia, this decision was as controversial as it is dangerous. Yet anyone reaching Hungary from Serbia could subsequently be deported back immediately, which imperils the emphasis on protection in international refugee law.

The governmental restrictions and attempts to close the border did not help to improve the situation. While the restrictions were being put in place, the situation in Hungary further escalated by the day, and from August to early September thousands of people got trapped at Budapest’s train stations. Their intention was to move further west towards Austria, Germany.

\textsuperscript{21} Szezsi, 2015

\textsuperscript{22} The numbers we reference in this section can be found on the official website of the Hungarian police: http://www.police.hu/hirek-es-informacoks/hatarinfo/elfogott-migransok-szama-lekerdezes/honap%3B-value%3D%85year%3D%3E%3Donap%3B-value%3Dmonth%3D

\textsuperscript{23} Safe third countries are non-EU countries that are considered safe for people seeking protection in the sense that they have a functioning asylum system and can provide effective protection.

\textsuperscript{24} The root causes of the fact that so many people sought international protection in Hungary are external: The summer months made travel easier; conditions in countries like Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and Libya as well as in refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon continuously worsened; an increase in the amount of deaths at sea caused people to choose land routes. Nevertheless, the decision of the Hungarian government to build a fence on the border with Serbia was certainly one of the main causes for the rapid increase in the amount of people that came to Hungary.
The crisis of the summer of 2015

2.1. Situation in Budapest

The absolute majority of people seeking international protection crossed into Hungary via Serbia, were usually caught by the police in and around the southern city of Szeged, fingerprinted for the EURODAC database, and sent to a closed detention centre or an open reception centre (to which we refer as a refugee camp). Until a closed registration centre was opened in Röszke (which is close to Szeged), those who were not detained received free train tickets to travel to the open camps in Bicske, Debrecen or Vámosszabadi.

The number of people entering the country in 2015 completely overwhelmed the already badly equipped Hungarian asylum system. The camps, set up to process asylum applications in accordance with the Dublin Regulations, were overcrowded to such an extent that the police often did not even attempt to bring people there anymore. More importantly, conditions in the various camps across the country were oftentimes straight out appalling.

In reaction to this, and cognizant of the poor integration possibilities, people tried to avoid registration and sought to leave Hungary as quickly as possible. As a result, thousands ended up in Budapest, literally en route, mostly at the big train stations but also in parks, or hiding in flats. From there, many would attempt to take westbound trains or, if they could afford it, pay a smuggler.

As the de facto first country of entry into the EU (Greece has not been considered a safe country for refugees since 2011), Hungary was hard-pressed throughout the summer to uphold its obligations as part of the Dublin Regulation. This means that, mostly because of international pressure, the government actively prevented people from leaving the country.
while it was clearly both unable and unwilling to pro-
vide people with any protection. On par with this, an
intensified practice of ethnic profiling in public spaces
made it more and more difficult for people seeking
protection to take a train to leave the country. Such re-
strictions, it needs to be noted, create a vibrant market
for smugglers, whom people were forced to rely on. For
a lot of them, however, this also meant that they were
deprived of the right and the means to continue their
journey and instead ended up being stuck at Buda-
pest’s train stations. The impressions from those days
and weeks still resonate widely: thousands of people
were sleeping outdoors on the floor, while food and
water were only being provided by volunteers and the
very few sanitary facilities set up by the municipali-
ties were vastly insufficient.

Then, on August 25, it was reported that the German
authorities would suspend the Dublin deportation of
Syrian nationals to Hungary. This preferential treat-
ment overlooked people from other countries, such as
Afghanistan or Pakistan, and contributed to tension
between different groups in refugee camps as well as
in transit zones in Budapest. The news spread quick-
ly, encouraging many, not only Syrians, to try to reach
Germany. This led to another increase of arrivals in
Budapest, nodal point on the route towards Germany,
and exacerbated the situation even further.

A tragic peak was reached on August 27 when 71 people,
including four children, were found dead in a lorry just
across the Hungarian-Austrian border. This brought a
lot of international attention to Hungary, and Budapest
in particular. Migszol organized a vigil for the victims
of the incident at Budapest’s Keleti train station, where
most people were stuck before continuing westwards.
After the vigil, a large group of Pakistanis spontaneous-
ly started protesting against the appalling conditions
they found themselves in. They demanded their right
to international protection, in Germany or elsewhere.
Soon, many of the 2,000 people camping at the station
joined these protests, which continued for multiple
days. In the meantime, the government was discussing
further changes to the asylum legislation that would
move seeking asylum to the sphere of criminal law (see
appendix 1 for details on the recent changes to Hungar-
ian asylum legislation).

26 Consider, for instance, the fact that Afghans are excluded from the
resettlement scheme, and Pakistanis deemed “economic migrants” that
should “internally relocate”, which de-legitimizes their right to pursue
international protection.
In response to the mounting pressure in Keleti, the government allowed hundreds of people onto trains. This prompted many more to spend hundreds of euro on train tickets. Then, under international pressure, the train-station was completely closed to new arrivals on August 31. Moreover, as protests continued and the number of people trapped at the train station steadily rose, the police and some like-minded volunteers attempted to “persuade” people to go to the camps – but in vain. On one occasion the police even went as far as to trick people. They were told they were entering trains bound for Austria, but were actually sent to the refugee camp in Bicske. There, people refused to get off the train and a critically ill Pakistani man died on the tracks while trying to escape the police.

All of the above culminated on September 4, when over 1,200 people left the train station on foot to walk along the M1 highway in the direction of Austria. Hungarian police and authorities just stood by so as to finally rid themselves of any responsibility towards them. This powerful initiative of people to move on, even by foot, was a strong symbolic act, which was also supported by many Hungarian and foreign volunteers who provided food and water for the people walking.

The criminalization of seeking protection in Hungary

Unsurprisingly, when the situation in Budapest had been “defused”, tensions were simply relocated to the Serbian border. The border fence with Serbia was finished on September 15, and was followed by violent clashes on the border and in Röszke, when water cannons and tear gas were used against people who were left on the other side of the fence.28 As alluded to already, the fence on the border with Serbia did nothing to prevent people from entering into Hungary: On September 18, three days after its completion, 7,852 people were registered in the country. However, after episodes of excessive violence by Hungarian police forces against people trying to cross, many simply took a detour on their way to the west by going through Croatia.30 An average of 6,000 people crossed the Croatian-Hungarian border every day in the first half of October, until another fence was also built there and the army employed to fully seal off the border. In the meantime, as long as people could still enter from Croatia, the Hungarian state packed them into buses and trains headed directly to the Austrian border. Importantly, Hungarian legislation actually considers this practice smuggling. Yet, for once, it was allowed to “solve” the “refugee crisis”, which goes to further indicate the hypocrisy of the government’s policies (for an overview of the charged nature, confusion over, and at times arbitrary use of the term “smuggler”, see clarification box VI).
The state-orchestrated transit from the Hungarian-Croatian border to the Hungarian-Austrian border overburdened the crossing-point to the west. In Hegyeshalom, a town next to the Austrian border, the crisis of the summer of 2015 made it impossible to apply for asylum in Hungary. The complete list of these amendments can be found in appendix 1.

The decision to declare Serbia a safe third country is of extreme importance in this context: from August 2015 onwards, people that had travelled through Serbia could be sent back there to apply for asylum, while Hungary sought to further close itself off. This is highly problematic for the simple fact that there is no functioning asylum system in place in Serbia. Accordingly, neither UNHCR nor any other EU country considers it a safe third country. Moreover, in the beginning of September, the Hungarian parliament accepted amendments to the national criminal code. This time, the amendments made “illegal border crossing” a criminal offense punishable by three years in prison. Also, damaging a border fence is now punishable by five years in prison.

VI. A NOTE ABOUT “SMUGGLING” AND “SMUGGLER”

We would like to note the politically charged nature, confusion over, and at times arbitrary use of the term “smuggler”. Along the recent changes in the Hungarian asylum legislation, the term became legally extremely ambiguous: On the one hand, anyone who would “contribute” towards “illegal border crossing” in any manner could be considered a smuggler, including numerous volunteers for example. On the other hand, the Hungarian government itself also provided transportation for tens of thousands of people from the Croatian border to Austria. Yet, this move to rid itself of the responsibility to accommodate them in Hungary was not considered smuggling.

needs of several thousands of people could not be met even though the government-supported Red Cross worked there alongside countless volunteers. As this example shows, it is important to note that neither local governments nor national or international humanitarian organizations stepped in to help during the summer. Instead, a remarkable response from the local population could be witnessed. Yet, as uplifting and commendable as this is, we also want to point out that the central government relied on these self-organized voluntary aid organizations to provide people seeking protection with their basic needs. This responsibility, of course, actually lies with the government.

Thus, in failing to provide basic services, the government of Hungary not only gravely violated its responsibilities towards people seeking international protection. In August and September 2015, it also implemented a number of changes to the Hungarian asylum law that have, effectively, made it impossible to apply for asylum in Hungary. The complete list of these amendments can be found in appendix 1.

The crisis of the summer of 2015

31 See for instance: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vwu4xCHML4XA and Migszol, 2015e
32 For detailed analysis, see also ECRE, 2015
33 HHC, 2015c
The crisis of the summer of 2015

The fence can lead to a multiple-year ban to enter the Schengen zone. This is alarming because international law, which assumes priority over national legislation, especially in humanitarian cases, unambiguously grants the right to cross borders in search of international protection. Yet, those concerns notwithstanding, the legislation came into force on September 15, concurrently with the completion of the fence on the Serbian border. Now, people who cross the Hungarian border without documents can either be detained until their deportation, or imprisoned – all “in accordance with the law”. Thus, at the time of writing, the majority of those who entered Hungary through the fence and have subsequently received expulsion-decisions from other Schengen-countries are detained in Immigration Detention. As deportation to Serbia proves to be very difficult to realize, not least because of the absence of any facilities there, Immigrant detention does not only take place in designated institutions, but also in regular prisons in Hungary. 34

As a result, it has become both practically and legally impossible to apply for asylum in Hungary. It’s only symbolic then that the country’s biggest reception facility in Debrecen was closed on October 20 after decades of operation.35 This helps the government to declare that the “refugee crisis” – a crisis that, as we argue throughout this report, the government itself has instigated – was finally “over”. Yet, the sad truth is rather that most people seeking asylum in Hungary are now detained, as Serbia does not accept deportees from Hungary. Others who have been deported back to Hungary under the Dublin Regulation, or have applied to asylum, have been transferred to refugee detention or open camps.36

Against this background, Migszol rejects labelling what happened in Hungary in the summer of 2015 as a “refugee crisis” (we outline the main reasons for why we think so in clarification box II). Over the years Hungarians have gotten accustomed to government rhetorics on “national character”, “Christian identity”, “foreign infiltration” or “limited resources”. Yet, the artificiality of those claims can easily be exposed, for example when we contrast the vast sum of money being spent on promoting exclusionary policies (not only through the media, but also through state-institutions such as the army, border regimes, etc.) with the pitiful resources allocated to the reception of foreigners, let alone their integration (e.g. in the form of Hungarian language-classes which are not supported). Therefore, the fact that this summer’s crisis was orchestrated becomes painfully clear when looking at how uninvolved local and national authorities were in meeting the most basic needs of the people stuck at Budapest’s train stations and parks. Had it not been for the large-scale voluntary efforts from civil society, most notably by Migration Aid and Segítsünk Együtt a Menekültnek (Let’s Help Refugees Together), the provisioning of food and health services would have failed altogether. In short, the notion of a “refugee crisis” is indicative of the very problem of the government’s short-sightedness and fear-mongering that we seek to address through our work in general and the interviews on which this report is based in particular. It was a crisis for the people fleeing crises, not for the policy makers who are obliged by international law to offer them protection. In our view, it is the Hungarian government’s policies, especially those criminalizing people in their flight from existential insecurity and poverty, that are at the core of the problem. Thus, calling what happened a “refugee crisis” is artificial insofar as it depends on a discourse that puts “us” against “them”, opposing, for example, “Europe” against “Islam”.

34 ECRE, 2015
35 Migszol, 2015f
36 Thorpe, 2015
3. Methodology

For the purposes of this report, we conducted mixed methods qualitative research between July and October 2015. This includes monitoring of legislation and media, participant observation, as well as daily interaction and communication with different actors from civil society. Moreover, between late July and early September the most intensive research weeks, we primarily conducted 46 semi-structured interviews with people in the transit zones and public places. This approach helps us to relate the individual experiences of the many different people seeking international protection to the wider context of Hungarian and European migration policy as well as the cause for a more humane and inclusive border regime. Migszol members in the research team were therefore chosen for their experience in social scientific and/or legal research, their language knowledge, intercultural and social skills and/or their own experiences as migrants or refugees in Hungary.
3.1. Semi-structured interviews

46 semi-structured interviews were held in Arabic, Farsi, Dari, Urdu, English and German. We focused on conducting interviews with a wide range of people, placing special emphasis on people in a vulnerable situation; injured/ill people, the elderly, families with small children, unaccompanied minors and pregnant women. This approach helped us decipher the many different policies and informal approaches that the authorities have towards vulnerable people, thereby exposing the purposeful flexibility that they applied to conceal their responsibilities.

We started each conversation by introducing Migszol and explaining why we were trying to gather information. This included handing out Migszol’s contact information with the assurance that they could communicate with us in their mother tongue if they had any questions at a later stage. This helped us build trust and stay in touch with the people we met. In general, we placed emphasis on a two-way flow of information. Before asking questions we often shared migration-related news and chatted about the recent developments. We also answered questions about Hungarian and EU migration policies but when people had more detailed or precise legal questions we directed them to others who could give up to date and correct counseling, most notably the Hungarian Helsinki Committee. As individuals, not as representatives of Migszol, we sometimes also took part in several humanitarian initiatives.

Where possible, we also offered tailored assistance, for example trying to help people look for lost family members or to get refunds for their unused train tickets. But when we went to talk to people we always emphasized that Migszol was not there to do humanitarian work.

Our questions were deliberately open-ended. This was intended to give individuals the chance to elaborate on their answers but also to make room for experiences and insights that we did not expect. We developed the questions on the basis of the topics that proved to be most pressing for people. Before posing more specific questions, we always asked them to recount their stories and experiences. This helped to adapt the interviews accordingly. For instance, those who crossed the border unnoticed were not held in the closed transit centre in Röszke and many times made it much further, even all the way to Austria, before being apprehended by the police. This relates directly to where people had their fingerprints taken and were initially registered, which in turn determines which national authorities assumed responsibility. Thus, we sought to adjust our questions to find out how this responsibility was implemented and how it affected people seeking international protection. We also adapted the interviews to the evolution of the (continuously more restrictive) Hungarian-Serbian border regime, for example by probing experiences with detention, which became ever more widespread as border-crossing was increasingly criminalized.

This is the outline of the questions we used for the interviews:

1. Crossing the border from Serbia

• How did you cross the border?
• How was your interaction with Serbian and Hungarian authorities?
• How was the situation for people around you?
• Did you suffer injuries?

2. Experiences in camps (including the closed transit centre in Röszke)

• What was the size of the space you were held in?
  – How many people were held in that space?
  – Were men, women and children kept in the same space?
• How was the hygiene?
• Did you receive water and food? How often and how much?
• In case of a stay that lasted more than eight hours: did you get a mattress to sleep on?
• Was there a possibility to use the toilet?
• How was your relationship with the police and other authorities?
• How did you give your fingerprints?
Methodology

In case of detention, these questions were added to the ones above:
• Were you detained (i.e. in Nyírbátor or Kiskunhalas)?
• Did you know where you were?
• Did you know why you were detained?
• Were you offered legal aid?

3. Transportation and the train stations

• How did you get to Budapest?
  – Did you have to use smugglers? If so, did you get the service you paid for?
• How long have you been at this train station/square?
• How have you been treated by the police?
• Are there any toilet facilities? If so, since when?
• Do you have any access to medical care?
• Did you buy international train tickets?
• Were you allowed to board the train?
  – If not: when, how and by whom were you stopped?
    What reasons were given?
  – If so: who prevented you from crossing the border and how? What reasons were given?
• Were you given information on how you can have your ticket refunded?

4. Other

• Did you meet with instances of racism or encounter neo-Nazis?

Amidst the xenophobic incitement from the government and the constant uncertainty about what was next, it was generally not easy to gain the trust of people in the transit zones. Yet, our involvement in activism and the fact that many interviewers were refugees or migrants themselves was generally seen as positive.

Moreover, given that the absence of established NGOs and international organizations was one of the most acute issues in the transit zones, we experienced that a lot of people turned to us in search of information and eager to share and exchange their experiences.

Yet, as is expected when conducting research in a volatile situation, we also faced several further challenges. One of our biggest challenges limited the scope of our research: Even though members of the research team spoke English, Arabic, Farsi, Dari and Urdu, we were still unable to speak with large segments of the people in transit, most notably many Afghans who speak Pashtu. The research is, then, biased towards Syrians as well as Dari and Farsi-speaking Afghans, Iranians, Iraqis, and Urdu-speaking Pakistanis. This is especially concerning when considering that in the larger context, too, the experience of Syrians and Iraqis is oftentimes emphasized at the expense of the voices and presence of people originating from other places, such as Afghanistan or Pakistan, where conflicts are protracted and often international.

The volatility of the situation was a constant challenge in itself, especially regarding the kind of information that we could pass on to people in transit. In order to keep a clear picture of what was happening, we had to monitor and follow Hungarian, Austrian and German news outlets, and be skeptical of misinformation and rumors. For example, many people, and many humanitarian volunteers, interpreted the decision of the German government to stop deporting Syrians under the Dublin Regulation as a cancellation of the overall framework.

Another challenge was that the people we spoke with could not always give us complete information. This, of course, matters for the account of their experiences, for example with regard to the route they had taken to reach Hungary. As many people were confused about the places they had passed through and did not always remember their names, we did our best to clarify the information. For instance, we showed pictures of
Interviews with people seeking protection to locate and identify them. Where possible, we also always sought to cross-check what people were saying against the documents they had received from authorities – not because we believe that officials “verify” experiences, but because we know that their intervention can shape those experiences in many important ways.
Most of the interviews were conducted in the so-called transit zones in Budapest. The official transit zones designated by the municipality were in the Nyugati, Keleti, and Déli train stations. In addition, II. János Pál pápa square, in the vicinity of Keleti train station, became an unofficial transit zone with hundreds of people sleeping and camping in the park. Near the park, a homeless shelter was providing emergency medical care and some hygienic facilities.

Life in these zones was marked by insecurities, and most people were shocked by the conditions. The situation was especially difficult for women with small children and babies, old people, and people with health problems. According to the people we spoke with, some experiences in Hungary were particularly traumatic and/or definitive for most of them. We therefore grouped the main themes for this section in the same way as they were shared with us.

- The grey zone on the Hungarian-Serbian border
- Registration and forced fingerprinting
- Röszke, detention and reception conditions
- Translation and information
- Minors
- Medical care
- Trains and smugglers
4.1. Grey zone on the Serbian-Hungarian border

While the absolute majority of people crossed to Hungary via Serbia, their experiences at the border changed according to the latest developments in Hungarian migration policy and swiftly changing practices at the border. Sometimes, the adversities they had to confront revealed themselves in seemingly banal factors, which led to a high degree of uncertainty. For example, experience differed from one another depending on whether or not there was enough space in the closed registration centre in Röszke. While many went there, others were exempt and could pass through. In any case, the train tracks leading to the border and to Röszke became emblematic of the Balkan route.

Prior to the completion of the border fence, people recounted stories of a ca. 50 meter-wide zone on the border where crime was endemic and people travelling westward were regularly robbed. For example, a Syrian couple from Aleppo that we met in Keleti recounted how they, along with others, had been robbed of all their valuables by men with knives and sharp gardening tools. According to them, the Hungarian police was stationed “nearby”, and did not act even when a Somali woman was screaming for help. An elderly Syrian man who travelled with the couple reported to the police at the border that they had been robbed and that the border zone is dangerous, but — again — the police did not respond. Our informants actually later met and recognized the perpetrators in Keleti, but decided not to talk to the police at this point any more for fear that it might hinder their travel onward to Germany.

A Palestinian woman with six children also confirmed the existence of this “grey” zone, commonly referred to as the “jungle”.37 She described it as a dangerous area, where anybody could get “beaten up and robbed.” Once people managed to get past it, they were usually caught by the police and separated according to gender and nationality. Amidst this, hardship did not recede. For example, another Syrian man from Idlib, 30 years of age, recounted how an Iraqi man in his company had tripped. Yet, the police pulled him into the barbed wire which cut his leg, and no medical help was offered to him. The police then left the place, as the Iraqi man remained lying on the ground.

All the people we spoke with at the Budapest transit zones experienced the practice of forced fingerprinting and registration. What differed here was mostly the kind of experiences they had. On the one hand, Hungarian police and border officials were required to register the fingerprints of everyone in order to adhere to the Dublin Regulation. On the other hand, there were also considerable exceptions to how the rule of forced fingerprinting was implemented, as we will demonstrate below. This indicates the relative flexibility of authorities and the lack of coherent and clear policy on the matter.

Nearly all our interviewees recounted how they were “forced” to give fingerprints, such as a 65-year old

37 The “Jungle” is a phrase commonly used for an area near Subotica, Serbia, where many people stay before trying to enter Hungary. Our interviewees also used the term for a zone on the Hungarian-Serbian border.
Afghan man who carried his half-destroyed military ID from Afghanistan in a plastic wrap. While he spoke about the fingerprinting, he had tears in his eyes. One family from Syria specified that it was the police that forced them to give fingerprints. Another family, also from Syria, whose mother had stayed in prison with her small children for two days, added that the police was even “beating up” those who refused to give fingerprints. An Afghan minor boy reported that the police had thrown teargas spray in his face before taking his fingerprints at the border.

But then there were also more positive stories. According to a Syrian man, 45 years of age, travelling with his wife and children, the police was friendly and not violent. The police officer even told them they could go “wherever” after they had their fingerprints taken. At Keleti, we met an 80-year old Iraqi woman in a wheelchair, who had been told by the police to simply continue to Budapest with a car so that she could meet her daughter, a Dutch citizen, who would come to pick her up. In this case, the police helped her to get into the car with the wheelchair, and never asked for fingerprints.

We also met a young man from Afghanistan who was not fingerprinted by the police, and a 16-year old Syrian boy from Damascus, who still carried his passport and had not been fingerprinted.

Positive exceptions notwithstanding, the risk of arbitrary treatment was imminent. Three Afghan men told us how the police asked them whether they wanted to apply for asylum in Hungary. In case they decided to move on, they were told they could “go to another country via Budapest”. But in case they were to decide to stay in Hungary, they were told they would face immediate deportation to Serbia. In another instance, a 35-year old man from Ghazni in Afghanistan, who travelled with his wife and three kids, told us at Déli train station that they had crossed the border on foot. He recounted that the police had told them that the border was “open” and they would not be fingerprinted. But then, he and his family had to give their fingerprints twice after arriving in Debrecen camp. In addition, there were also a lot of people who managed to cross to Hungary without being caught by the police. In order to avoid forced fingerprinting, they tried to travel to Budapest by any means possible, which was often very dangerous. Yet, even though many managed to hold on to their passports, they were, however, caught later, especially when attempting to travel to Austria by train.
In summer 2015 many people were detained and incarcerated typically for short periods of time (ranging between several hours up to a few days). While most of our interviewees reported cases of detention, it is also important to stress that not everyone was detained, or suffered indiscriminately. Neither was the police violent with everyone; some interviewees emphasized that the authorities behaved politely and respectfully.

At the same time, the response from the Hungarian state was often arbitrary and chaotic to say the least. For example, there was a clear lack of communication and dissemination of relevant information to the people seeking international protection. As such, while people were not informed of the reasons for which they were detained, they also did not know where they were detained, as the following account relates:

“They take you to a camp where the situation is not bad but not good either. Then they take you to the second camp where they take your fingerprint and you get a number on a wristband. They put you into a room, 40 people in a 36x18 feet room for one day. At 3-4 o’clock in the morning they take you to a third camp. We got no information in Urdu and only met an interpreter in the second camp. We were kept in the third camp for two days and were not allowed to leave the camp. Some were kept there for four days even. Then we got sent to Budapest.”

*Pakistani man at Keleti, August 17*

Most people we spoke with said they spent at least one night detained in Röszke after crossing the Hungarian border. There, men and women (together with their children) were usually put in separate cells. Then, after being incarcerated for usually around 24 to 48 hours, they received the instruction to continue to either one of three designated destinations, the open camps in Bicske, Vámosszabadi or Debrecen, and were given free train tickets to reach these destinations.

People who had stayed in Röszke reported very poor conditions, the lack of drinking water and medical care. For instance, we met three Syrian young women, all with small children, who independently from each other confirmed that they had all been detained in a cell of 4x3 square meters altogether with 27 people. All three mothers had asked for food and water for the children, but the police refused to give them any. When the women tried to lift their young children to the window to get some fresh air, the police even told them to put them down. On another worrying instance, the 8-year old daughter of a Syrian man also shared her story: At the Hungarian-Serbian border, she was kicked by a police officer while she carried her 1-year old niece. Later, when they were in the detention center, a female police officer also hit and kicked the people in the group, including the little girl.

Interviewees also reported that the hygienic conditions in Röszke and other sites were abysmal. This is especially serious when considering that the weather in the summer 2015 ranged from extreme heat waves to severe storms. The lack of sanitary facilities furthermore worsened a wave of diarrhea that broke out in Röszke as well as Budapest during this time. In Debrecen, the conditions in the camp were similarly bad, as an Afghan man told us. According to him, there were only three beds in a room of approximately 9 square meters for 10 to 12 people available. He further reported that sanitary conditions were appalling and that the camp was extremely dirty.

Another serious issue that our interviewees reported was the overcrowding of detention facilities. For example, five young Afghans, some of them unaccompanied minors, told us of having shared a 7x12m cell together with 40 people. In Röszke, congestion was so severe that some people even had to sleep on blankets on the ground. This was indicated by three minor and two 18-year old Afghan boys. They recounted to us how they had been kept in an outside yard, during the heatwave of 37 degrees, with about 200 people around and not enough space to sit or lie down.
Given the congestion and chaotic governance, Röszke was also the point where families were torn apart. For example, this happened to a Syrian woman, 46, from Aleppo, who lost three of her children there (all young men). After their phones had been switched off during their detention and they were separated, she was waiting for them in Keleti together with her daughters, not wanting to move on before her sons are found. We also met a Syrian woman from Aleppo, 28, who had lost a brother in Röszke.

The issue of translation and information came up in nearly all of our interviews and interactions with people seeking protection. While we actually spent a substantial amount of time translating various official documents, such issues could have been avoided, or reduced at least, if the information were also available in English, rather than only in Hungarian.

To illustrate, consider this ludicrous case: People had to sign that they “understood” the paper they were handed, only to ask us and others later on what was written above their signature. In many types of documents, such as the official paper to indicate a person’s willingness to apply for asylum, a separate signature from a translator is required. Yet, a minor Afghan boy reported to us that the stamp and signature of an Arabic translator had been added retrospectively to his documents even though no translator was actually present. In most documents we saw, the respective section was simply empty. The below image shows an example of such a document.

An Afghan family that we met on II. János Pál pápa square recounted another episode. They had been told by the police that they had 48 hours to “leave the country” (as Macedonian and Serbian authorities are known to do), while in reality this probably meant that they had 48 hours to go to their designated camp. According to our experiences, such misunderstandings are more the rule than the exception in the Hungarian asylum
Interviews with people seeking protection and migration policy. They are telling of the extremely poor, or inexistent level of translation. In one case, a representative from the Indian embassy was invited to talk to Pakistani people who were detained – the men recounted how the representative came to the prison, but left without talking to them. As a result, they did not know what was going to happen to them, let alone voice their concerns and have their rights addressed.

The treatment of unaccompanied minors, who in our experience mostly travel together and come from Afghanistan, was especially worrying. While they warrant particular protection, determining their age is difficult and controversial, as we have previously reported in our blog.38 In any case, detention of minors is not permissible according to Hungarian and international law39, and constitutes a violation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in particular.40 Yet, we examined various documents that indicate that minors have been detained even though their age (under 18) was also clearly marked on the very same document. A 14-year old Afghan boy from the Hazara minority, whose entire family lives as refugees in Pakistan and who survived a shipwreck while crossing the sea from Turkey to Greece, also shared another incidence with us. He recounted that there were “beatings in the camp” in Hungary (he could not identify the exact place), where the authorities had used sticks in the beating, and one boy in his company had thereby lost his consciousness.

Another group of Afghan boys reported that they were detained in Kiskunhalas, where a doctor examined them to determine their age. The examination consisted of looking at their genitalia. Whereas only one was, in the end, considered underage, the rest were ascribed an identical date of birth: January 1, 1997. This edict made them legally over-age in one fell swoop.

A similar story happened to a minor boy from Syria, born in 2001. He had his passport with him but did not want to show it to the authorities, fearing that it would be confiscated. He told the doctor that he was 14, but was nevertheless also assigned the 1st of January 1997 as his birthday. Moreover, the boy told us that minors of 14 years of age were not fingerprinted, while those

38 Migszol, 2014c
39 For more specific information on Hungary, see Global Detention Project, 2016
40 End Child Detention, 2016
aged 16 were. This shows that minors are also especially dependent on translators. As a 17-year old boy from Pakistan explained to us, for example, he believed his translator never relayed the information about his age to the police and told him to “get serious” instead.

**Medical care**

During the research period, we also paid special attention to people in need of medical care. This is because, similar to minors, people in need of medical care warrant active help and support from the state and other institutions. In turn, the lack of such support exposes the inhumane consequences of the asylum and reception policies and governmental practices in Hungary. This is particularly troubling because many people seeking international protection suffered injuries during their journey, or had chronic conditions which require treatment. While there was medical aid provided by volunteer doctors in the transit zones in Budapest, the latter were severely limited in number and in equipment. For instance, we spoke to an Afghan man with diabetes, whose wife was carrying syringes with insulin, but which were being spoiled in the heat of the summer. A visibly exhausted doctor we spoke with could only tell them to try to obtain ice for the insulin from the nearby McDonald’s restaurant.

Medical aid was also the reason why some people wanted to travel to the west. For example, a 28-year old Syrian woman wanted to reach Sweden together with her mother and husband. She had heard there are good doctors in Sweden, who could help her with infertility after nine years of marriage. We also spoke with a Syrian woman, 40, who was a teacher at home. The woman had left three sons behind in Syria to travel to Europe in order to organize a cornea operation for the son she was travelling with.

Moreover, medical care in the camps was notoriously lacking. An Afghan man from Ghazni told us that his son was sick during his stay in Debrecen camp and did not receive any medical attention whatsoever. He also reported that during his stay he witnessed how difficult and oftentimes impossible it was to find a doctor for pregnant women in need of medical help.

Denying people from boarding on the trains they had bought tickets for was by far the largest cause of anxiety, fear and bitterness to all our interviewees. We would like to point out that although legally asylum-seekers did not have the right to travel to another Schengen country, the way this rule was reinforced via a strict regime of ethnic profiling was certainly not legal: those who “looked” like migrants were not allowed into the station. This denial also carried a significant financial loss. Many families lost money worth of hundreds of euro, as refunding the tickets was practically impossible. In case they did not have an official ID, they were not able to use money transfer services such as Western Union to have additional funds transferred from family members and support networks.
Most people we spoke to had no knowledge of the reasons why they were not allowed to embark on the trains. Our interviewees also reported scams, whereby they were charged for tickets in euro after they were told the price in Hungarian forints, which made the purchase significantly more expensive. Another interviewee showed us tickets to Hamburg worth 300 euro. But since he was not permitted to board, all the money he paid for the tickets was lost. On one occasion, two people from our research team were attempting to obtain a refund for tickets to Munich worth 700 euro that a Syrian family we interviewed had purchased. After waiting for hours, we were told the refund was impossible because of “bureaucratic reasons”, and the family lost their last money.

The denial to let people on the trains created a vibrant market for smugglers. The prices of smugglers, known as “taxis”, fluctuated in accordance to border policy. Our interviewees had paid anything between 200 to 500 euro for trips from the border areas to Budapest, and from Budapest the price range for travelling to western Europe was between 500 to 1500 euro, with France being the most expensive destination.
In this report, we have, firstly, documented the experiences of some of the many different people that came to Hungary in search of international protection, and secondly, we related those experiences to the increasingly restrictive political and legal context in Hungary.

In particular, we focused on the summer of 2015, from June to October, while the interviews took place only until early September. During this time, the government of Hungary built a fence at the border with Serbia, one of the main land routes for people from all over the world to reach Europe. At the same time, through legislative changes, it also effectively abolished the asylum system in the country. In this attempt to stop immigration to and through Hungary altogether, the government in effect sought to rid itself of the responsibility to fulfil the basic rights of people seeking international protection. In this sense, the decision to legally and physically close the Hungarian-Serbian border was yet another element of the xenophobic and racist policies that the government of Hungary has carried out in the past years. In fact, those policies only contributed to the escalation of events that the government later decried as a “refugee crisis” (see explanation of crisis in box 2).

Against this background, it is crucial to capture the experiences of the many different people that have been directly negatively affected by the current border regime. This is because those experiences are otherwise too often neglected, when the situation is reduced to a “crisis” that warrants a particular governmental response, and the human dimension of the ensuing drama not acknowledged. Yet, those experiences matter not only for us in the attempt to get an understanding of how the border regime actually works and what effects it has. They also serve as a constant reminder for what we should do when thinking about more inclusive alternatives to the current border regime, in Hungary as much as Europe. To us as Migszol, this means that we should directly talk to and engage with people, instead of patronizing and generalizing attitudes that denies agency and voice from them. This
is how Migszol started in 2012, and how we continue to work until today. Solidarity and direct dialogue have always been the foundation for what we do, which is why we talk as much as possible with the people that come here, not merely about them.

This report was divided in four sections. The first introduced the group that authored this report and our reasons for writing it. In the second section, we zoomed in on the summer of 2015 to trace how seeking protection in Hungary was increasingly criminalized. In the third section, we presented the methodology for our research and the 46 interviews we conducted in total. Then, in the fourth and main section, we introduced seven themes that emerged from the interviews we conducted. Altogether, those themes provide a comprehensive account of how people seeking international protection experienced the workings and effects of the European, but in particular Hungarian border regime in the summer of 2015.

In particular, the main findings of this discussion include the following points:

• Many people described the transit area at the Hungarian-Serbian border as a “grey zone”, where crime was endemic and no protection available.

• This illustrates a main concern that emerged throughout the whole report, namely that the very people seeking international protection are time and again left helpless and alone, exposed to criminal activities in many different guises and governmental regulations that are arbitrary at best and inhumane at worst.

• The experiences with registration and forced fingerprinting further document this concern. Here, our interviews indicate the significant differences in how people were treated. In general, as part of the Dublin regulations, Hungarian police and border officials are officially required to register everybody. Yet, a number of people told us that their passports were confiscated in order to force fingerprinting. Others then said they were treated nicely and even allowed to go “wherever” without any interference from the authorities. And others still managed to pass the border without being fingerprinted at all and could hold on to their passports. Those stories, too, indicate the relative flexibility of authorities, which makes governmental regulations arbitrary because no coherent and clear policy is in place.

• The conditions of reception and detention in the different places that people were brought to upon their arrival in Hungary were reported as very poor. While not everybody was detained, most people stayed for a day or two in the makeshift center in Röszke before they were instructed by the authorities to continue to Bicske, Vámosszabadi or Debrecen. Almost all people we spoke to described the hygienic situation
there as particularly dire. They all said that there was not enough space for too many people. Also, people mentioned that there was not enough food, and many important dietary products for babies and children were missing. Another severe problem was that many did not know where they were and, above all, what was going to happen to them. Thus, this point also clearly illustrates the haphazard and chaotic response from the Hungarian state and the lack of communication and information to the people seeking protection.

- Related to this is the point on translation and provision of information, which almost all the people we spoke with said were many times inexistent or in any case insufficient. Often, there was not even English translation available and the most important pieces of information were regularly presented only in Hungarian. Moreover, when we met them in the transit zones in Budapest, many people told us they actually had to sign official paper that they did not understand at all. This practice, as dangerous as it is legally questionable, unnecessarily increases the feeling of insecurity and helplessness of the people seeking international protection vis-à-vis governmental instructions.

- In this context, the treatment of unaccompanied minors is exceptionally sensitive and important. Minors warrant utmost support and protection. This not only makes the incidents of maltreatment we were informed about particularly troubling. Based on our interviews, it seems that authorities try to “upgrade” their age in order to be able to treat them as grown-ups. This is a perilous practice that was reported to us by several Afghan boys who travelled without a passport. With the exception of one they were all given a new birthday: January 1, 1997. This makes them 18 by summer 2015 and, thus, legally adult. Thus they do not get the special protection guaranteed to minors during their asylum procedure and their deportation would then be in “accordance with the laws”.

- With regards to medical care, we found that there was no official support from the municipality or the government in the transit zones in Budapest. Instead, volunteer doctors stepped in and provided medical aid where the government failed to do so. Yet, they were severely limited in number, capacity and in equipment.

- Finally, regarding the possibility and means of transportation, we found that denying people from boarding the trains they had bought tickets for was by far the largest cause of anxiety, fear and bitterness. Particularly troubling is the strict policy of ethnic profiling through which such denials were carried out: those who “looked” like migrants were not allowed into Budapest’s train-stations. This denial also carried a significant financial loss. Many families lost hundreds of euro, given that the refunding for the tickets turned out to be practically impossible. In turn, the denial to board the trains created a vibrant market for smugglers, known as “taxis”. Thus, while the Hungarian government intentionally ignored their concerns, people seeking international protection were compelled to pay up to 1500 euro to continue their journey westwards.

5.2. Demands and suggestions

The summer of 2015 marked, in a way, a short period in which Hungarian asylum policy was widely talked about in national and global media. Since then, however, the discussion has quieted down. But the very border regime that has led to the escalation of the crisis over the summer is still in full effect. For example, European Union leaders have recently agreed with Turkey to outsource external border patrolling to the Turkish shores in return of financial aid and possible visa-free travel to the Schengen zone for Turkish citizens. This will not only create lucrative business opportunities to smugglers, but also result in new and more dangerous routes to Europe. Thus, to put it very simply, that there is currently no discussion about the “refugee crisis” anymore is precisely the reason why all of us should continue our political pressure against ongoing xenophobic, nationalist and exclusionary policies, in Hungary and elsewhere.
Towards this end, we – together with the many people currently affected by the restrictive border regime – need to raise our voice to make it very clear to the international community and European politicians that Hungary is now the first European Union member state to de facto abolish its asylum system. This development indicates that Hungary is not a safe country for people seeking international protection. Therefore, deportation to Hungary under the Dublin regulation has to stop. Moreover, as people still try to cross through Hungary to seek international protection, they are being criminalized instead. This practice also needs to end because it leaves people seeking international protection in a legal and existential limbo. As Migszol, together with you, we therefore demand from the European Union to act upon the principles it claims to cherish and work to reprimand the violations of the responsibility of its members, especially when such basic rights as the right to seek international protection are violated.

More specifically, with regards to our political activism in Hungary, there are three broad and interlinked groups of issues Migszol proposes to focus on:

- The first relates to the lack of government support for those who are already in the country and will stay here. Here, we must continue to pressure the government to offer Hungarian language classes (which it stopped doing), assist them in finding appropriate housing (rather than criminalize homelessness as it does), and facilitate access to the job-market (rather than extend social work schemes).

- The second point targets societal and political problems in Hungary that drive exclusion and racism. We must therefore address the issue on the level of the Hungarian society. Here, school curricula for example, but also media reporting and other, more informal and ordinary ways of public interaction are crucial. Through them, stereotypes are conventionally strengthened. But it is through them that stereotypes can also be broken and a sense of a more inclusive and diverse society be cultivated.

- The third and most important point we need to address is the legal fence that criminalizes seeking protection. The urgency of this point is evidenced by the current situation, whereby the consequences of the measures the Hungarian government took in the course of the summer of 2015 loom large until today. That is, as we sought to point out in this report, the lack of government support significantly exacerbates socio-political problems. This includes grave issues such as imprisonment upon entering Hungary, deportation (to Serbia), a volatile legal environment with intermittently arbitrary implementation, and few possibilities to seek redress.

To address these issues in particular, Migszol makes the following suggestions.

- **Awareness must be raised** on the European and Hungarian level regarding the fact that Hungary’s legislation has made it practically impossible to seek asylum in the country.

- **A counter-narrative needs to be established** to battle the government propaganda that portrays migration as a threat to Christianity and Hungarian and European “civilization”.

- **The already existing connections between grassroots movements across all the sectors of Hungarian society need to be nurtured** in order to battle racism and segregation in Hungary. This is especially acute not only for those seeking international protection, but also for the country’s Roma population and for those living in insecure housing.

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41 In January 2016, Finland froze all Dublin deportations to Hungary, while the European Council of Refugees and Exiles compiled a report on court decisions from different EU member states stopping deportation to Hungary. See http://neurope.eu/article/finland-court-rules-to-suspend-asylum-returns-to-hungary/ (accessed 19 February 2016), and ECRE, 2016

42 See Fekete, 2016 for an analysis on how the Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, has utilized the “Christian-National idea” for both rallying xenophobia against Roma and refugees, and for undermining democratic institutions in Hungary.
Together with Hungarian citizens, migrants, and people seeking protection, Migszol continues to work towards these goals. We encourage everybody to join in on our common cause – so feel free to get in touch with us and spread this report. Finally, we would like to extend our thanks to all the people who shared their stories with us during the hard months of the summer, and to all volunteers, people from Hungary as well as many other countries, who stepped in the place of the government to prevent an even larger humanitarian catastrophe from taking place.


APPENDIX 1: AMENDMENTS TO THE HUNGARIAN ASYLUM LAW IN AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER 2015

• From August 1, 2015, the asylum procedure no longer consists of two parts – the preliminary and the detailed procedure – but only one part. Before, the two parts included two interviews, but now there is only one interview.

• Also, since August 1, admissible asylum claims can be referred into an accelerated procedure. According to the amendment, the Office of Immigration and Nationality (OIN) must make its decision in the accelerated procedure within 15 days. If the asylum-seeker appeals against a negative OIN-decision to the court, the judge must decide in eight days. These are all very short procedural deadlines which can lead to hasty and unfounded decision-making.

• Legally, the only way for asylum-seekers that come through Serbia and Croatia and want to enter Hungary is through the transit zones. At those zones, too, an extremely accelerated asylum procedure (referred to as border procedure) is applied and asylum-seekers are detained without any legal ground. Under this procedure, asylum applications are hardly ever examined on the merits (Commissioner for Human Rights, 2015).

• Since August 1, Hungary has become the only country in the EU that considers Serbia a safe third country for asylum-seekers. This means that if a person who seeks asylum entered Hungary through Serbia – as the vast majority of asylum-seekers do – OIN rejects the asylum applications, arguing that they should have applied for asylum in Serbia. According to the law, asylum-seekers with special needs should be exempted from the border procedure. However, only families with small children are actually granted an exception and, according to the practice of the OIN, not rejected automatically if they arrived from Serbia. In contrast to that, many vulnerable people are rejected and are facing deportation to Serbia. This is due to the fact that the OIN does not have adequate competency to evaluate who has special needs (e.g. victims of torture, members of sexual minorities, people with mental health problems).
According to the Hungarian Helsinki Committee, Serbia should not only be considered as an unsafe third country for asylum-seekers with special needs, but simply for anybody seeking asylum. This is because of insufficient reception conditions in Serbia, the risk of a chain-refoulement to Macedonia (and further to Greece and Turkey), and due to its inability to grant the appropriate protection to asylum-seekers.

- Currently, those asylum-seekers who were returned to Hungary under the Dublin Regulation are also rejected and are awaiting deportation to Serbia, even though most of them entered Hungary from Serbia months before the Hungarian government declared Serbia a safe third country (see ECRE, 2015, page 35).

- Since September 15, whoever enters Hungary through the fence between the Serbian-Hungarian and the Croatian-Hungarian border is immediately sentenced in a fast-track criminal procedure to an expulsion from the whole EU and her/his right to seek asylum is not respected.

- Also, since September, the Hungarian courts do not have the right to change or challenge the decision of the OIN any more. Previously, the courts – as a very important guarantee – could grant refugee or subsidiary protection status to somebody who has been rejected by the OIN. Now, since the new law on asylum, the courts can only return the case to the OIN without being able to change it. Yet, after the court returns a case to the OIN, most of the times the OIN issues the same negative decision. This means that the new law violates people’s right to an effective legal remedy.

- According to the new law, asylum-seeker do not automatically have the right to have an interview at the court. This means that the new law violates the asylum-seekers’ right to good administration (HHC, 2015d).

- Foreigners apprehended at the border without documents can be detained for 24 instead of twelve hours (as under the previous legislation). If a foreigner should decide to ask for asylum during this period, this initial detention can be extended for an additional twelve hours, and up to a total of 36 hours.

- Prior to August 1, at least five sq. metres moving space and 15 cubic metres space per person were required in the cells of asylum jails. Yet, the amended Asylum Government Decree turned this mandatory rule into a non-binding recommendation, inserting the expression “if possible” into the relevant rule. In light of the aforementioned amendments aiming at a further extended use of detention, it is particularly worrisome that the OIN now becomes officially authorised to tolerate even serious overcrowding in asylum jails.
APPENDIX 2: TIMELINE

June 17  The Government of Hungary (GoH) orders the construction of a “temporary border control fence” at the Hungarian-Serbian border.

June 26  The Hungarian Police conducts systematic raids to capture migrants in the 8th district.

June 29  In the Detention Camp in Debrecen, riots break out due to maltreatment of asylum-seeker and bad conditions.

July 1  Viktor Orbán, Prime Minister of Hungary, states that the fence on the Serbian-Hungarian border does not conflict with human rights agreements. He also confirmed that the closure of the border would be “temporary”. Serbian, Hungarian and Austrian interior ministers agree on cooperation on joint border control and control of smuggling.

July 2  The deadline of the “National Consultation on Immigration and Terrorism” is extended until July 15.

July 3  The Hungarian parliament discusses speeding up the construction of the fence at the Hungarian-Serbian border.

July 5  The far-right party Jobbik says it would close down all the refugee camps in Hungary.

July 6  The Hungarian parliament confirms legal changes proposed by Interior Minister Sándor Pintér to authorize the construction of the fence at the Hungarian-Serbian border, employ refugees in public work schemes, and declare Serbia a safe third country.

July 8  Nagyfa might become a permanent camp.

July 9  German Chancellor Angela Merkel states that a wall/fence is not a solution to the “refugee-crisis”. Interior Minister Pintér announces that refugee/detention camps in Hungary will be moved away from inhabited areas.

July 10  Nazis attack refugees at Budapest’s Keleti train-station.

July 13  Hungarian Defence Force begin construction of the fence at Morahalom, a town next to the Hungarian-Serbian border, backed by police. Members of the extreme right Betyársereg group announce that they want to expel refugees from the south of Hungary, if necessary by force.

The Hungarian Helsinki Committee publishes directions/orientation for volunteers that want to help refugees.

July 14  Péter Szijjártó, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Hungary, declares that the fence is needed.

Migszol organizes an anti-fence demonstration in Budapest.

July 15  A Syrian refugee dies in Röszke after escaping from the police and then being hit by a car.

Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament, says the fence is not a solution.

July 16  The fortification at the Hungarian-Serbian border is intensified.

The GoH announces it will make crossing the border a criminal offense and that all refugee/detention camps in Hungary will be closed and refugees moved to tent-camps instead.

July 17  The spokesperson of the GoH, Zoltán Kovács, states that the criminal code will be in line with EU law.

July 18  The first 175 meter “test part” of the fence at the Hungarian-Serbian border is ready.

A girl in the city of Szeged is beaten up because her boyfriend is black.

July 20  The EU-wide quota system for the distribution of refugees is discussed and the GoH says they will take none.

July 21  The GoH announces the opening of a new refugee camp next to Nagybaracska and Nagyfa. A refugee drowns in Tisza river next to the Hungarian-Serbian border.

July 22  The GoH identifies its list of safe third countries and includes Serbia in it.

July 23  Index.hu reports on how refugees are not being served food around the Keleti train-station.

July 25  The GoH publishes its interpretation of the “National Consultation on Immigration and Terrorism” saying that “Hungarians have decided” that they “don’t want illegal migrants”.

Prime Minister Orbán gives a speech in Romania in which he claims that Europe is in danger and that the “Hungarian Hungary” needed to be preserved against left-wing opposition, illegal migrants and EU-bureaucracy.

Index.hu and ABCUG report how people are sleeping outside in Vámosszabadi near the Hungarian border with Slovakia.

July 27  An Afghan man is stabbed at the Hungarian-Serbian border.

July 29  The GoH raises the budget for the construction/maintenance of the border-fence to 30 billion HUF (almost 100 million EUR) (see here for English).

Four Syrians are robbed in Szeged.
State authorities conduct a raid at the Keleti train-station and expel refugees from the subway-area.

Aleksandar Vulin, Serbian Minister of Labor, says that Hungary needs to protect the border to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe.

26 refugees who wanted to reach Munich were taken down from trains in Győr.

The mayor of Budapest István Tarlós declares that the municipality will come up with an action plan for transit-zones.

The GoH announces that the obstruction of the construction of the fence might result in huge fines.

The Rőszke train-station is reopened.

The legal changes in the asylum code take effect (confirmed by the parliament on July 6).

The construction of the border-fence in Ásotthalom is completed.

The GoH announces that new camps will be build in Sormás and Martonfa and that it will ensure security there.

Máté Kocsis, local mayor in Budapest, talks about how the city’s 8th district has become “a refugee camp”.

The mayor of Budapest says there will be transit zones in the city.

Átlátszó finds out that the GoH has spent 380 million HUF on a xenophobic poster campaign (around 1,2 million EUR) 67 refugees are brought to a hospital in Szeged because of diarrhea.

New border control equipment is taken to use in Mohács next to the Hungarian border with Croatia and Serbia.

18 refugees try to cut the fence at Ásotthalom and are caught and therefore put to detention.

The GoH announces that a new refugee camp will be build next to Tesco Supermarket in Kiskunhalas.

The Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs Péter Szijjártó says in a German newspaper that “we don’t need a quota system” because the people currently coming to Hungary “are not real refugees”.

Demonstrations in Sormás and Martonfa against the announced opening of refugee camps.

Hungary is to get 19 billion HUF (around 61 million EUR) from the EU to support the country’s asylum-system.

The ministry of interior begins to recruit armed guards to guard the new refugee camps.

The official rationale for the fence changes again: Now the government says that a double barrier will be needed for the entire length of the Hungarian-Serbian border.

The announced transit zones are finally established in Budapest and water and other basic facilities are set up at the Keleti train-station and other places.

A transit zone opens also at Nyugati train-station in Budapest.

The GoH asks for 2,5 billion HUF (around 8 million EUR) from the EU for the admission/reception of refugees.

The GoH self-acclaims that it is over-achieving in the protection of Schengen border, and using its “available resources and technical means” to “fulfil its duties” as part of the Frontex operation.

Prime Minister Orbán discloses plans of deploying border hunters to look for refugees in the border areas.

The former Prime Minister of Hungary Péter Boross says that the “trouble” with refugees is that they are not white.

Austria does not let trains pass at the border in Hegyeshalom.

Smugglers, who squeezed 39 refugees in one car, are caught in Budapest.

The mayor of Budapest says that the situation at the Keleti station is becoming unbearable and impossible to control.

110 of the 175 kilometer of the fence at the Hungarian-Serbian border is ready, while people are crossing the fence by putting sleeping bags on it to protect themselves.

Police raid at the Keleti station and people are taken off trains bound westward.

Minister of Interior Sándor Pintér approves of the border hunters, 800 “law enforcement professionals” should be deployed initially.

The mayor of Budapest contemplates terminating transit-zones in the city and relocating them to the 7th district.

The GoH orders the army to the Hungarian-Serbian border. Tear gas used in Rőszke while 200-250 people escape the camp.

A bus is found in Austria with 71 dead refugees in the lorry.

The Minister of the Prime Minister’s Office János Lázár announces that the EU was not able to protect its borders, the Hungarian parliament would approve new legislation on “illegal migration”, prisons currently had enough space
to accommodate the migrants that cross the border, and that the maintenance of the transit-zones took 77 million HUF/month.

**August 28** The GoH warns of “increasingly aggressive migrants”.

**August 31** Refugees in Keleti train station are allowed to board trains leaving for Austria and Germany.

Huge commotion at the Keleti train station, while in Vienna thousands protest in support of refugees.

**September 1** Hungarian authorities close down Keleti train station, while more protests unfold there.

**September 2** Protests at the Keleti station continue, people are demanding free onward travel to Austria and Germany.

The GoH launches a new “information campaign” against “illegal migration”.

**September 3** Viktor Orbán meets the Presidents of the European Parliament, the European Council, and the European Commission in Brussels to discuss migration issues.

Keleti train station opens again, but trains stop at the border with Austria and some people are taken to Bicske camp without their consent; announcements are made in Hungarian only.

**September 4** Refugees stuck in Bicske train station protest.

March of Hope: refugees start walking towards Austria from Keleti station.

Late at night, the GoH has an emergency meeting except for Prime Minister Orbán who is watching football.

Austria and Germany announce that they will receive refugees from Hungary because of “emergency situation”.

**September 5** 4500 refugees are transported overnight to the Austrian border.

Refugees are attacked in Budapest’s II. János Pál pápa tér by football hooligans.

Thousands arrive in Austria and Germany after borders are opened.

**September 6** The GoH launches information campaign on immigration transit routes.

Austrian aid convoy heads to Hungary to help refugees travel to Vienna.

**September 7** Keleti train station is empty, numbers are gathering at Röszke at the border with Serbia.

The Hungarian Minister of Defence Csaba Hende resigns over the refugee crisis.

**September 8** Hundreds of people stranded in Röszke, but only one bus is sent to pick them up. This leads to protests when more and more people request to be allowed to leave the premises of the makeshift camp. Refugees break the cordon of riot police. Police use tear gas.

Video of Hungarian camera woman kicking refugees goes viral.

**September 9** Hundreds march on foot from Röszke towards Budapest.

Refugees in Keleti train station are boarding trains to Hegyesalom (border with Austria) by the hundreds.

**September 11** 3800 soldiers deployed at Hungary’s southern border.

14 buses sent to Röszke to pick up people.

**September 12** Refugees Welcome – Solidarity Day protests organized all over Europe.

**September 13** Germany introduces temporary border controls at its border with Austria.

**September 14** Last refugees board buses in Röszke.

**September 15** The fence with Serbia is completed, Hungary seals the border.

The police starts enforcing the new law and people are arrested for illegal border crossing and damaging government property by cutting through the fence.

**September 16** Violent scenes in Röszke after the police uses tear gas against people seeking protection. The border remains closed, and the route starts to change towards Croatia and Slovenia instead of Hungary. Orban gives an interview and claims that the refugee crisis signals a crisis of liberal ideology and means end to “liberal blabla”. Austria announces that temporarily it will not send people back to Hungary. Orban announces that there will be a fence also on the Croatian border.

The Secretary-General of the UN condemns the police attacks on people seeking protection in Hungary.

**September 17** 88 Hungarian lawyers sign a letter in which they protest the government’s migration policy.

35 people are charged for illegal border crossing in the southern court of Szeged.

**September 18** Thousands of people arrive in Hungary from Croatia, and the GoH transports them to the Austrian border.

The Chief advisor to the GoH says the Hungarian army will be sent to the Croatian border, and there are diplomatic clashes between Croatia and Hungary.
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>September 19</td>
<td>Thousands of people seeking protection continue to come to Hungary, and the Hungarian government transports them to Austria.</td>
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<td>September 21</td>
<td>Viktor Orbán holds a speech in the parliament and claims Hungary is in danger. Hungarian advertisements appear in newspapers in Jordan, saying it is illegal to come to Hungary.</td>
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<td>September 22</td>
<td>Hungarian Parliament sends an open letter to the European Union, blaming the EU for the events of the summer. The European Parliament votes and approves a quota system for refugees, although Hungary opposed to it.</td>
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<td>September 23</td>
<td>Orban rejects “moral imperialism” from Germany. A high level EU meeting on the situation in Hungary and elsewhere takes place in Brussels. Leaders decide on a hot spot system and resettlement of refugees to other European countries.</td>
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<td>September 24</td>
<td>János Lázár announces that a fence will be built on the Croatian and Romanian borders of Hungary.</td>
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<td>September 25</td>
<td>The daily number of people arriving in Hungary increases by thousands, topping 8000. The Foreign Minister Peter Szijjártó claims in an interview with BBC that there is a foreign media campaign against Hungary, and repeats that the GoH considers Serbia a safe country for refugees.</td>
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<td>September 30</td>
<td>The governments of Austria and Germany discuss stricter asylum policies.</td>
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<td>October 1</td>
<td>Prominent Fidesz-politician Lajos Kósa states that integration of Muslims is “hopeless”.</td>
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<td>October 2</td>
<td>Orbán states that asylum seekers resemble an “army”.</td>
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<td>October 3</td>
<td>Kósa announces that the refugee camp in Debrecen will be closed by the end of the year.</td>
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<td>October 5</td>
<td>Fidesz announces it will not approve of resettlement quotas and is ready to take the issue to court.</td>
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<td>October 6</td>
<td>The European Commission announces it has severe concerns over Hungarian asylum legislation and earlier events in Röszke.</td>
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<td>October 7</td>
<td>An institute finds that phobia against refugees has grown in Hungary.</td>
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<td>October 9</td>
<td>The Visegrád 4 group agrees on stronger cooperation to “control” migration.</td>
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<td>October 15</td>
<td>János Lázár announces that the border fence with Croatia is ready, thereby effectively closing the border in a matter of a few days.</td>
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