Institute of Social and Political Sciences

OVERCOMING THE 'GRASSROOTS' MOMENTUM: THE RISE AND THE FALL OF THE 2015 SOLIDARITY INITIATIVES IN HUNGARY (2015-2023)

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Abstract:

This thesis investigates what challenges the solidarity grassroots initiatives (GRIs) formed in Hungary as a response to the 2015 Migration crisis faced after the autumn of 2015 when the migration flow to the country ceased. It examines in detail the evolution of the three largest groups (Migration Aid, Let's Help Refugees Together, and Migrant Solidarity Szeged) two of which became legally registered as NGOs, as voluntary civil society organisations (CSOs) engaged with migrant work in the predominantly anti-migrant environment in Hungary – a state with comparatively low levels of civic activism as well, a common characteristic of post-communist states. Based on a theoretical framework providing testable explanatory components of GRIs' prosperity and on empirical work on-site in Hungary, involving in-depth interviews with 13 participants, this research presents an extensive overview of the concrete 'factors' that contributed either to the closure or the continuation of the activities of the 3 organisations until the present day. The results unequivocally pinpoint 2 factors that had the greatest effect on GRIs' 'survival', or their 'failure' post the 2015 events – namely the size of the volunteer body and the persistence of the leadership. Furthermore, this research provides evidence on two more grounds – firstly, that the legal environment in which civil society organisations in Hungary exist greatly affects their capability to sustain operations, and secondly, that volunteers assisting in humanitarian emergencies may experience a number of mental health issues that severely affect their wellbeing, personal lives, and willingness to continue volunteering.

Key words: *Migration crisis, grassroots organisations, civil society, volunteerism, Hungary*

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

More than 1.25 million people rushed to Europe in 2015 [1] most of whom escaped civil wars and military conflicts in the Middle East, Africa and Asia. [2] As the 'Refugee crisis' or the 'Migration crisis' (both terms were used in the public discourse in Europe, the distinction between the two will be addressed later) swept through the Old Continent, it severely affected Hungary, which only during the 'Long summer of migration' in 2015 recorded more than 500,000 people crossing its territory. [3] Although the Central European state was not a destination country for the migrants who wanted to reach Western and Northern Europe [4], the issue of migration became a frontrunner in the Hungarian domestic agenda and remained a top priority in Hungarian politics ever since 2015. [5]

Starting in early 2015, the Hungarian government led by Viktor Orbán commenced a wide-scale anti-migration campaign across Hungary, constructed border fences along Hungary's southern borders, and made numerous changes in the national legislation, all measures aimed to sever any attempts of crossings into the country. [6] [7] The communication strategy of the government proved fruitful when soon after sociologists in Budapest observed a significant rise in the levels of xenophobia in Hungary [8], followed by an all-time peak in early 2017, while xenophilia almost completely disappeared. [9]

A common observation among scholars researching different social phenomena across Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) is that the post-communist civil societies are much 'weaker' in comparison with their counterparts in the West. [10] [11] This 'weakness' stems primarily from the negative legacies of Communism, such as the 'lack of interpersonal trust and the low levels of civic activism.' [12] These characteristics are successfully applied to the Hungarian case as well, where frail civic participation and low levels of societal trust [13], as well as a lack of

[1] Greussing, E. & Boomgaarden, H. (2017) Shifting the refugee narrative? An automated frame analysis of Europe's 2015 refugee crisis, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 43:11, 1749-1774
[2] Thorleifsson, C. (2017) Disposable strangers: far-right securitisation of forced migration in Hungary, Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale 25
[3] Simonovits, B. (2020) The Public Perception of the Migration Crisis from the Hungarian Point of View: Evidence from the Field, in Geographies of Asylum in Europe and the Role of European Localities, Springer
[4] Juhász, A., Hunyadi, B. & Zgut, E. (2015) Focus on Hungary: Refugees, Asylum and Migration, Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, Political capital Kft.
[5] Bíró-Nagy, A. (2021) Orbán's political jackpot: migration and the Hungarian electorate, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies
[6] Cantat, C. & Rajaram, P. K. (2018) The Politics of the Refugee Crisis in Hungary: Bordering and Ordering the Nation and Its Others, The Oxford Handbook of Migration Crises, Oxford University Press
[7] TARKI Social Research Institute (2016) The Social Aspects of the 2015 Migration crisis in Hungary
[8] Ibid.
[9] Simonovits, B. (2018) Inter-Group Contacts and Anti-Immigrant Sentiments at the Dawn of the 2015 Migration Crisis: The Case of Hungary, ELTE Eötvös Lóránd University Budapest
[10] Szent-Iványi, B. & Lightfoot, S. (2016) Determinants of civil society influence: The case of international development and humanitarian NGOs in the Czech Republic and Hungary, Comparative European Politics Vol. 14, 6, 761–780
[11] Oxford University Press (2011) The Oxford Handbook of civil society
[12] Szent-Iványi, B. & Lightfoot, S. (2016) Determinants of civil society influence: The case of international development and humanitarian NGOs in the Czech Republic and Hungary, Comparative European Politics Vol. 14, 6, 761–780
[13] TARKI Social Research Institute (2016) The Social Aspects of the 2015 Migration crisis in Hungary

volunteer culture, prevail. [14] However, during the pinnacle of both the Migration crisis and the anti-migrant atmosphere in the summer of 2015 in Hungary, thousands of volunteers mobilized themselves in various forms of grassroots support groups to assist the migrants. [15] The voluntary movement was so colossal, that researchers named it the 'Hungarian humanitarian miracle' [16] - in certain locations the massive voluntary wave exceeded the needs.[17] Ultimately, the 2015 Migration crisis provided an unprecedented impetus for humanitarian civic mobilisation in Hungary, which awoke the 'sleeping' civil society. [18]

This well-recorded contradiction lies at the center of this research and constitutes its counter-expectations research puzzle. The questions of why people mobilised and what the main motivations behind their voluntary participation were have been covered by different researchers, hence, these aspects are not going to be the focus of this thesis, although a summary of those previous findings will be provided for a necessary contextual background. This research will center on what has happened to the three largest voluntary grassroots organisations that were born amidst the 2015 Migration crisis in Hungary – namely Migration Aid (MA), Let's Help Refugees Together (in Hungarian: Segítsünk Együtt a Menekülteknek, SEM) and Migrant Solidarity Szeged (in Hungarian: Migráns Szolidaritás Csoport Szeged, also known as MigSzol Szeged) since the stop of the migration flow to Hungary in the autumn of 2015. The decision to focus on these 3 grassroots initiatives is justified by the facts that they attracted the greatest number of volunteers during the crisis, and they were the most visible groups among the grassroots organisations providing help to migrants on the streets of Hungary. [19] The main research question of this thesis is defined as the following:

What are the main factors which contributed to the success or failure of the 3 solidarity grassroots initiatives after the end of the 2015 Migration crisis in Hungary?

After an extensive literature review was completed, there is currently a lack of detailed research on the exact reasons why some of these groups ceased to exist, while others continue their operation until the present day as full-grown institutionalised NGOs. By addressing this gap, this thesis strives to first of all, provide valuable insights into the factors which have positive or negative effects on the survival of voluntary grassroots organisations without any prior organisational history, working in the field of humanitarianism. Secondly, to complement

[14] Timmer, A. (2017) Responding to the Crisis: Humanitarian Aid to Refugees and Migrants in Hungary, Bulletin of the General Anthropology Division, Volume 24, No. 2
[15] TÁRKI Social Research Institute (2016) The Social Aspects of the 2015 Migration crisis in Hungary
[16] Ibid.
[17] Timmer, A. (2017) Responding to the Crisis: Humanitarian Aid to Refugees and Migrants in Hungary, Bulletin of the General Anthropology Division, Volume 24, No. 2
[18] Ibid.
[19] TARKI Social Research Institute (2016) The Social Aspects of the 2015 Migration crisis in Hungary

the existing literature on grassroots movements by suggesting other important elements which may prove critical for the evolution of these initiatives into professional aid organisations, or their definitive collapse.

The following thesis will adopt an outcome-centric, inductive qualitative research design in order to properly address the research question. The research will follow a social-constructivist (interpretivist) perspective, which focuses on examining humans as main social actors rather than objects. [20] Creswell (2009) describes this as a worldview and a paradigm that embodies '[…] individuals seeking an understanding of the world in which they live and work […] The goal of the research is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied. The questions become broad and general so that the participants can construct the meaning of a situation.' [21]

The participants' views were gathered and analysed by employing a number of different research methods: first, semi-structured open-ended interviews were completed with 13 different individuals, who were interviewed over the course of 2 months. All interviewees are either past or present volunteers for the 3 grassroots organisations mentioned above, professionals working in long-established NGOs in the field of humanitarianism in Hungary, and academics, observing the field of civil society in the country. After the information was collected and transcribed, a qualitative data analysis (QDA) was completed, applying a manual open coding method to help identify different categories (factors). These categories later served for an in-depth evaluation of the post-2015 development for each of the three case studies (the above-mentioned grassroots initiatives) and their 'success' or 'failure' in continuing operation.

This thesis will have the following structure: in the upcoming Second chapter, a detailed overview of the events surrounding the 2015 Migration crisis in Hungary will be presented to provide context for the issue, remarking on important historical circumstances. Chapter 3 introduces the conceptual framework, while Chapter 4 provides a thorough review of the research methodology and the process of data analysis. Chapter 5 illustrates in detail the empirical findings, gathered during the fieldwork in Hungary.

[20] Sheppard, V. (2020) Research Methods for the Social Sciences: An Introduction
[21] Creswell, J. (2009) Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches, Third edition.

CHAPTER 2: CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND: THE 2015 HUNGARIAN HUMANITARIAN MIRACLE

In 2010, Viktor Orbán returned to the post of the prime minister of Hungary, leading the Central-European country into what he later called a state of 'illiberal democracy.' [22] [23] In 2014, during a speech at the Free University of Băile Tuşnad, Romania, Orbán declared that: *'The new state we are constructing in Hungary is a non-liberal state. It doesn't reject the fundamental principles of liberalism, but it doesn't make this ideology the central element of state organisation, but instead includes a different, special, national approach.'* [24] The speech later became known as 'Orbán's illiberal democracy speech' [25], where he condemned the West for its decline, mainly because of its open tolerance for multiculturalism. [26] The governments of Viktor Orbán have since then introduced various reforms following the concept of the new 'illiberal regime' that include amendments in the electoral system that abundantly favour the party in power and severely limit the opportunities of the opposition, [27] gaining more political influence over the media, [28] adopting a new Constitution mirroring the views of the ruling party, and appointing people close to the party in various national institutions. [29] Some researchers have described the post-2010 regime in Hungary as semi-authoritarian [30] with a rapid process of democratic backsliding (autocratisation) taking place. [31] In such regimes, Szalai and Kopper (2020) argue that '[…] fear politics attain an everyday status and are used for various policy purposes. In such systems, othering is constantly used to mobilise, create uncertainty, justify extreme measures, and depict the government as the only source of security.' [32] All of this was perfectly evidenced during the unfolding of the 2015 Migration crisis in Hungary when migrants were presented as endangering the Hungarian welfare, national security, culture, and Christian identity. [33]

[22] Thorleifsson, C. (2017) Disposable strangers: far-right securitisation of forced migration in Hungary, Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale 25
[23] Kallius, A., Monterescu, D. & Rajaram, P. (2016) Immobilizing mobility: Border ethnography, illiberal democracy, and the politics of the "refugee crisis" in Hungary, American ethnologist, Vol. 43
[24] Ibid.
[25] Szalai, A. & Gobl, G. (2015) Securitizing Migration in Contemporary Hungary, Central European University
[26] Ibid.
[27] Kalmar, I. (2020) Islamophobia and anti-antisemitism: the case of Hungary and the 'Soros plot', Patterns of Prejudice, 54:1-2, 182-198
[28] Bocskor, A. (2018) Anti-Immigration Discourses in Hungary during the 'Crisis' Year: The Orbán Government's 'National Consultation' Campaign of 2015, Sociology 2018, Vol. 52(3) 551–568
[29] Kalmar, I. (2020) Islamophobia and anti-antisemitism: the case of Hungary and the 'Soros plot', Patterns of Prejudice, 54:1-2, 182-198
[30] Szalai, A. & Kopper, A. (2020) Translating Security across Borders: Staging the Migration Crisis in Hungary and Transylvania, Millennium: Journal of International Studies 2020, Vol. 48(3) 297–322.
[31] Buzogány, A., Kerényi, S. & Olt, G. (2022) Back to the grassroots? The shrinking space of environmental activism in illiberal Hungary, Environmental Politics, 31:7, 1267-1288
[32] Szalai, A. & Kopper, A. (2020) Translating Security across Borders: Staging the Migration Crisis in Hungary and Transylvania, Millennium: Journal of International Studies 2020, Vol. 48(3) 297–322
[33] Thorleifsson, C. (2017) Disposable strangers: far-right securitisation of forced migration in Hungary, Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale 25

Outlining which terms prevailed in the public discourse during 2015 in Hungary is of great significance since the countries in Central and Eastern Europe frequently associate the term 'migration' with 'threats, losses, failures, and enemy images that generate negative perceptions.' [34] Moreover, the Hungarian history 'lacks a positive migration story' [35], even when considering the migration of ethnic Hungarians to Hungary from the neighbouring states[36], who were left outside the borders of the country after its defeat in WWI. Following the Treaty of Trianon (1920) considered a 'national tragedy' [37] for Hungary, the country lost 63.6% of its population and more than 70% of its pre-war territory [38] while the notably smaller 'new' Hungarian state became markedly ethnically homogenous in favour of the Hungarian ethnic group. [39] The post-WWI elites in Hungary adopted different assimilation policies targeting the remaining minority groups, following the 'ideology of Hungarian cultural supremacy.' [40] Nevertheless, Hungary was not the sole country in Europe which considered national minorities an 'issue' in the period between the two wars. [41] Other countries in the CEE region, including the newly established Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Romania, as well as Greece and Turkey, enforced the assimilation, the straightforward eviction, or in certain cases the coercive exchange of minority groups between states to achieve ethnic homogeneity within the respective populations. [42] [43] Today, homogeneity is praised by Viktor Orbán as a 'value' of modern-day Hungary [44], which more than 100 years later is still a country in which the foreign-born (or migrant) population constitutes an insignificant part of the total population (between 1% and 2%) [45]:

> *'We regard it to be a value that Hungary is a homogenous country and that it shows a very homogenous face in its culture, way of thinking and customs of civilisation. We consider this a value, and we would not like to sacrifice this value.' [46]*
>
> *Viktor Orban, 2015*

[34] Juhász, A., Hunyadi, B. & Zgut, E. (2015) Focus on Hungary: Refugees, Asylum and Migration, Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, Political capital Kft.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Dessewffy, T. & Nagy, Z. (2021) Dreaming homogenous – power switches of history in public discourse in Hungary, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 47:18, 4189-4208
[38] Vardy, S. (1983) The Impact of Trianon upon Hungary and the Hungarian Mind: The Nature of Interwar Hungarian Irredentism, Hungarian Studies Review, Vol. X, No. 1
[39] Bocskor, A. (2018) Anti-Immigration Discourses in Hungary during the 'Crisis' Year: The Orbán Government's 'National Consultation' Campaign of 2015, Sociology 2018, Vol. 52(3) 551–568
[40] Dessewffy, T. & Nagy, Z. (2021) Dreaming homogenous – power switches of history in public discourse in Hungary, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 47:18, 4189-4208
[41] Jelavich, B. (1983) History of the Balkans, Vol 2., Cambridge University Press
[42] Ibid.
[43] Diószegi, L. (2009) A Story of Survival: the Hungarians of Romania, 1919-1989, Hungarian Studies Review, Vol. XXXVI
[44] Dessewffy, T. & Nagy, Z. (2021) Dreaming homogenous – power switches of history in public discourse in Hungary, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 47:18, 4189-4208
[45] Simonovits, B. (2020) The Public Perception of the Migration Crisis from the Hungarian Point of View: Evidence from the Field, in Geographies of Asylum in Europe and the Role of European Localities, Springer
[46] Dessewffy, T. & Nagy, Z. (2021) Dreaming homogenous – power switches of history in public discourse in Hungary, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 47:18, 4189-4208

The small number of migrants meant that migration 'was a marginal issue in Hungary until 2015' [47] which is portrayed by survey data from 2004 until 2014 when approximately 2% of Hungarians considered migration as the most serious problem the country faces. [48]

The difference between the terms 'migrant', 'refugee', and 'asylum seeker' is poorly addressed in the public discourse and the literature, [49] hence it's vital to differentiate them in order to avoid any conceptual imprecision in this research. 'Migrants' can be understood as people who possess a foreign nationality, and 'by their movement into a country different from their origin to seek new living circumstances.' [50] This definition also includes 'refugees' and 'asylum seekers' as well as people who are looking for better economic conditions abroad (or economic migrants). [51] [52] The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) defines 'refugees' as 'People who have fled war, violence, conflict or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country.' [53] According to the 1951 Geneva Convention and the supplementing Protocol of 1967 (also known as the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or the 1951 Refugee Convention), refugees are at risk of 'persecution and inhumane treatment' in their country of origin and shall be provided with international protection. [54] The act of feeling one's home country and seeking refuge in another by applying for asylum makes them an 'asylum seeker.' [55] This entails one's 'right to be recognized as a refugee' [56] and to be given material and legal support. [57] However, an asylum seeker is obliged to prove that she or he has a 'well-founded fear of persecution' in their country of origin. [58] During 2015, the term 'migrant' was preferred over 'refugee' by the Hungarian government, since its official rhetoric implied that the people coming are not refugees, but economic migrants because they have already crossed other countries (such as Serbia) which were classified as 'safe third countries' by Hungary and therefore they could no longer be considered 'refugees.' [59] Consequently, the official government communication heavily favoured the terms 'illegal migrants' and 'economic migrants' to mold public debates. [60]

[47] Bíró-Nagy, A. (2021) Orbán's political jackpot: migration and the Hungarian electorate, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies.
[48] Stivas, D. (2021) The art of securitising. Orbán's handling of the European refugee crisis, Journal of Contemporary European Studies
[49] Keri, S. (2015) Suffering Has No Race or Nation: The Psychological Impact of the Refugee Crisis in Hungary and the Occurrence of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Soc. Sci. 2015, 4, 1079–1086
[50] Ibid.
[51] Davis. K. (2020) The European Union's Dublin regulation and the migrant crisis, Washington University Global Studies Law Review, Vol. 19, Issue 2
[52] Metcalfe-Hough, V. (2015) The migration crisis? Facts, challenges and possible solutions, Overseas Development Institute
[53] UN Refugee Agency (2023) What is a Refugee? [Online]. [Accessed on 11.04.2023]. Available from https://www.unhcr.org/what-refugee
[54] Lovec, M. (2017) Politics of the Schengen/Dublin System: The Case of the European Migrant and Refugee Crisis, in Border Politics: Defining Spaces of Governance and Forms of Transgressions, Springer 2017
[55] UN Refugee Agency (2023) What is a Refugee? [Online]. [Accessed on 11.04.2023]. Available from https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/what-is-a-refugee/
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Bocskor, A. (2018) Anti-Immigration Discourses in Hungary during the 'Crisis' Year: The Orbán Government's 'National Consultation' Campaign of 2015, Sociology 2018, Vol. 52(3) 551–568
[60] Simonovits, B. (2020) The Public Perception of the Migration Crisis from the Hungarian Point of View: Evidence from the Field, in Geographies of Asylum in Europe and the Role of European Localities, Springer

In the literature, both 'Migration crisis' and 'Refugee crisis' can be found as terms when discussing the events of 2015. The main causes of the Crisis were the Syrian civil war, as well as the military conflicts in Iraq, and the destabilisation of Afghanistan [61], which are humanitarian emergencies that provoked massive displacement of populations due to war. [62] Respectively, Syrians accounted for 29% of all asylum seekers in Europe in 2015 (378,000), followed by 193,000 asylum seekers from Afghanistan, while around 127,000 people from Iraq also sought asylum. [63] In total, 1,2 million people submitted a request for asylum in EU Member states in 2015. [64]

However, not all individuals who sought asylum in an EU state in 2015 were people escaping war or military conflicts. Data from Eurostat shows that the 4th and the 5th largest groups of asylum seekers were people from Kosovo (66,885) and Albania (65,935). [65] Scarce employment options as well as corruption, poverty, and frustration about the country's politics have been the main determinants for emigration from Kosovo since 2014/2015, resulting in 100,000 Kosovars leaving the country over that period to resettle in EU member states [66] with more than a half of those people applying for asylum. [67] A similar situation was observed regarding migrants from Albania who lodged asylum applications in the EU in 2015 when many Albanians cited reasons such as poverty and high unemployment for leaving their home country. [68] Consequently, the term 'economic asylum seekers' emerged to describe the 2015 asylum requests of Albanians. [69] In line with the 1951 Refugee Convention, however, fleeing a country on economic grounds doesn't permit one to be recognized as a refugee, following the definition outlined above. [70] In 2015, 97% of all asylum applications from Syrian nationals in Europe were granted refugee status after the first request. [71] Approximately 65% of the Afghani applicants and the majority of Iraqis also went through the asylum procedure successfully, nevertheless, only around 5% of the applications from Kosovo and Albania had a positive outcome. [72]

[61] Kugiel, P. (2016) The Refugee Crisis in Europe: True Causes, False Solutions, The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs
[62] Thorleifsson, C. (2017) Disposable strangers: far-right securitisation of forced migration in Hungary, Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale 25
[63] Pew Research Center (2016) Number of Refugees to Europe Surges to Record 1.3 Million in 2015
[64] Eurostat (2016) Record number of over 1.2 million first time asylum seekers registered in 2015. [Online]. [Accessed on 14.07.2023]. Available from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/7203832/3-04032016-AP-EN.pdf/790eba01-381c-4163-bcd2-a54959b99ed6
[65] Ibid.
[66] Hajdari, L. & Krasniqi, J. (2021) The economic dimension of migration: Kosovo from 2015 to 2020, Humanities and Social Sciences Communications vol. 9, 103
[67] Eurostat (2016) Record number of over 1.2 million first time asylum seekers registered in 2015. [Online]. [Accessed on 14.07.2023]. Available from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/7203832/3-04032016-AP-EN.pdf/790eba01-381c-4163-bcd2-a54959b99ed6
[68] Migration Policy Institute (2015) Embracing Emigration: The Migration-Development Nexus in Albania. [Online]. [Accessed on 28.07.2023]. Available from https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/embracing-emigration-migration-development-nexus-albania
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Pew Research Center (2016) Number of Refugees to Europe Surges to Record 1.3 Million in 2015
[72] Ibid.

Even though most of the people who wished to enter European soil in 2015 were escaping military conflicts and violence in their respective countries of origin, [73] the 2015 Migration wave in Europe also consisted of people who were motivated by economic reasons. Hence, in this Research, when referring to the 2015 Crisis the umbrella term 'Migration crisis' will be preferred instead of the narrower 'Refugee crisis', since the wave also included people who were denied asylum (were not given refugee status), as well as economic migrants.

2.1 Historical background

As noted by scholars, to accurately portray the events surrounding the 2015 Migration crisis in Hungary and its aftermath, it's crucial to briefly examine the country's experience with population shifts. [74] As previously mentioned, after WW1 the ethnic composition of Hungary was already strongly in favour of the majority ethnic group. [75] During WWII, approximately 600,000 Hungarian Jews were killed in the Holocaust [76], while between 1945-1948 about 220,000 Hungarians with German ancestry were expelled from Hungary and deported to Germany. [77] Hence, by the arrival of communism in 1948, the only sizable non-Hungarian minority group in the country was the Roma. [78] Following the 1956 Revolution, around 200,000 Hungarian refugees fled to Austria, while 30,000 of them were transported to the United States.[79]

After the fall of communism in CEE, migration controls were eased, and Hungary served as a transit country for people migrating from the East to the West. [80] The first time in recent history, when Hungary experienced an influx of refugees, was during the early 90s when people began fleeing the destructive wars in neighbouring Yugoslavia, triggering the movement of mostly ethnic Hungarians from Yugoslavia to Hungary. [81] Although the wars were broadly covered by the local media, the Yugoslav refugees never became a central topic

[73] Metcalfe-Hough, V. (2015) The migration crisis? Facts, challenges and possible solutions, Overseas Development Institute
[74] Bocskor, A. (2018) Anti-Immigration Discourses in Hungary during the 'Crisis' Year: The Orbán Government's 'National Consultation' Campaign of 2015, Sociology 2018, Vol. 52(3) 551–568
[75] Ibid.
[76] Dessewffy, T. & Nagy, Z. (2021) Dreaming homogenous – power switches of history in public discourse in Hungary, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 47:18, 4189-4208
[77] Márkus, É. & Bello, M. L. (2021) Mihály Lieb or Mihály Munkácsy? Developing Cultural Identity in Hungary's German National Minority Schools, Hungarian Cultural Studies, e-Journal of the American Hungarian Educators Association, Vol. 14
[78] Dessewffy, T. & Nagy, Z. (2021) Dreaming homogenous – power switches of history in public discourse in Hungary, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 47:18, 4189-4208
[79] Goździak, E. & Marton, P. (2018) Where the Wild Things Are: Fear of Islam and the Anti-Refugee Rhetoric in Hungary and in Poland, Central and Eastern European Migration Review, Vol. 7
[80] Bocskor, A. (2018) Anti-Immigration Discourses in Hungary during the 'Crisis' Year: The Orbán Government's 'National Consultation' Campaign of 2015, Sociology 2018, Vol. 52(3) 551–568
[81] Juhász, A., Hunyadi, B. & Zgut, E. (2015) Focus on Hungary: Refugees, Asylum and Migration, Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, Political capital Kft.

of public debates or politics. [82] These circumstances surrounding the wave of the 90s, coupled with the low percentage of foreign-born population in Hungary, have led some researchers to the conclusion that the 'Hungarian society has no realistic picture of immigrants and no first-hand experience with them' [83], as well as no exposure to multiculturalism. [84]

Nevertheless, Hungarians are one of the European nations which holds the highest degree of prejudice towards different minority groups, foreigners, and 'indigenous others' [85], a conviction that has deep socio-historical roots. [86] These negative attitudes gravitate mostly around anxieties for economic security and labour market access which are seen as being threatened by outsiders – a common characteristic for the post-communist societies of Central and Eastern Europe. [87] In 2013, approximately one-third of the Hungarian population lived in poverty, or 33%, while 1,5 million people of that 33% lived in conditions of deep poverty. [88] High rejection levels in Hungary are also recorded to impact the Roma minority (around 6% of the total population and the largest ethnic minority in Hungary) [89], homeless people, and those part of the LGBTQ+ community. [90]

The last historical cross-reference which is important to be outlined is the post-communist legacy of the country, which has severely affected the levels of popular participation and the creation of a strong and independent civil society in contemporary Hungary. [91] Oxford University's research on civil society (2011) explicitly points out past communist regimes as 'the most significant and powerful variable for explaining organisational membership' in the post-communist states. [92] Civil society, also commonly referred to as the 'third sector, the nonprofit sector, or the voluntary sector' [93] can be understood as a 'space for citizen action and engagement' [94] which 'covers a huge range of entities of different types, sizes, purposes, and levels of formality, including community or grassroots associations, social movements, professional groups, NGOs, social enterprises, and others' [95], organised externally

[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Szalai, A. & Gobl, G. (2015) Securitizing Migration in Contemporary Hungary, Central European University
[85] Bocskor, A. (2018) Anti-Immigration Discourses in Hungary during the 'Crisis' Year: The Orbán Government's 'National Consultation' Campaign of 2015, Sociology 2018, Vol. 52(3) 551–568
[86] Juhász, A., Hunyadi, B. & Zgut, E. (2015) Focus on Hungary: Refugees, Asylum and Migration, Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, Political capital Kft.
[87] Bíró-Nagy, A. (2021) Orbán's political jackpot: migration and the Hungarian electorate, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies.
[88] Fekete, L. (2016) Hungary: power, punishment and the 'Christian-national idea', Institute of Race Relations, Vol. 57(4): 39–53
[89] Simonovits, B. (2020) The Public Perception of the Migration Crisis from the Hungarian Point of View: Evidence from the Field, in Geographies of Asylum in Europe and the Role of European Localities, Springer
[90] Bocskor, A. (2018) Anti-Immigration Discourses in Hungary during the 'Crisis' Year: The Orbán Government's 'National Consultation' Campaign of 2015, Sociology 2018, Vol. 52(3) 551–568
[91] Lomax, B. (1997) The strange death of 'civil society' in post-communist Hungary, The Journal of Communist Studies, and Transition Politics, 13:1, 41-63
[92] Oxford University Press (2011) The Oxford Handbook of civil society
[93] Köver, A. (2015) Captured by State and Church: Concerns about Civil Society in Democratic Hungary, Nonprofit Policy Forum 2015; 6(2): 187–212
[94] Oxford University Press (2011) The Oxford Handbook of civil society
[95] Ibid.

from the state. [96] Volunteerism – an expression of social solidarity, plays a vital role in understanding the concept of civil society and is considered one of its 'underpinnings.' [97]

Party officials in socialist Hungary as in other communist states strictly controlled all aspects of the public sphere, repressing any kind of associational life which was not initiated and approved by the state apparatus. [98] As Timmer and Docka-Filipek (2018) specify, the civil sphere of communist societies included solely workers or neighbourhood organisations supporting the regime. [99] The membership of those associations was compulsory [100] and many people felt alienated from voluntarism and community service initiatives. [101]

Researchers have stressed other factors influencing the emergence of a vibrant associational life after the collapse of the totalitarian systems in Central and Eastern Europe, such as the high resource dependency of the third sector, corruption, social inequality, and lack of strong democratic practices [102], post-communist disappointment in the political and economic reality, the legacy of institutional and inter-social mistrust [103], lack of self-autonomy, self-responsibility, and poorly advanced entrepreneurial values. [104] Furthermore, the 'paycheck to paycheck existence' [105] of a large proportion of Hungarians leaves citizens with severely restricted free time or finances to volunteer. [106]

It's also important to note that when assessing the 'strength' of the civil sphere in the post-communist space, this evaluation is made for societies, whose understanding of the concepts of community development and volunteering were heavily distorted for more than 4 decades during communism, and therefore these very same concepts amount to totally new realities with the arrival of democracy in CEE. [107] Despite the massive pro-democratic protests that occurred in the region between 1989 and 1991, the participative wave quickly faded away and did not result in an upsurge in voluntary organisations' engagement, contrary to what many researchers expected. [108] EU accession, which was viewed as the endpoint of the transition periods for the European post-communist states, didn't manage to provide a solution for the

[96] Hann, C. (2020) In search of civil society: From peasant populism to postpeasant illiberalism in provincial Hungary, Social Science Information 2020, Vol. 59(3) 459–483
[97] Hustinx, L., Cnaan, R. A., & Handy, F. (2010) Navigating theories of volunteering: A hybrid map for a complex phenomenon. Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour, 40 (4), 410-434
[98] Oxford University Press (2011) The Oxford Handbook of civil society
[99] Timmer, A. & Docka-Filipek, D. (2018) Enemies of the Nation: Understanding the Hungarian State's Relationship to Humanitarian NGOs, " Journal of International and Global Studies: Vol. 9: No. 2, Article 3
[100] Voicu, B. & Voicu, M. (2009) Volunteers and volunteering in Central and Eastern Europe, The Research Institute for Quality of Life, Romanian Academy of Science, Romania
[101] Schreier, C. (2015) 25 Years After: Mapping Civil Society in the Visegrád Countries, Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2015.
[102] Köver, A. (2015) Captured by State and Church: Concerns about Civil Society in Democratic Hungary, Nonprofit Policy Forum 2015; 6(2): 187–212
[103] Oxford University Press (2011) The Oxford Handbook of civil society
[104] Voicu, B. & Voicu, M. (2009) Volunteers and volunteering in Central and Eastern Europe, The Research Institute for Quality of Life, Romanian Academy of Science, Romania
[105] Timmer, A. (2017) Responding to the Crisis: Humanitarian Aid to Refugees and Migrants in Hungary, Bulletin of the General Anthropology Division, Volume 24, No. 2
[106] Ibid.
[107] Voicu, B. & Voicu, M. (2009) Volunteers and volunteering in Central and Eastern Europe, The Research Institute for Quality of Life, Romanian Academy of Science, Romania
[108] Oxford University Press (2011) The Oxford Handbook of civil society

'weaknesses' of CEE civil societies either.[109] Hungary joined the EU in 2004, but the economic crisis that hit the country soon afterwards had an enormous impact on CSOs (civil society organisations), whose resource funds and operational space were significantly limited after 2010. [110]

2.2 Hungary's response to the Migration wave

Shortly after the January 2015 terrorist attack against *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris the government of Viktor Orbán invested around € 28 million into orchestrating a nationwide anti-migration campaign across Hungary, [111] [112] which included many right-wing messages targeting migrants. [113] The communication campaign found fertile grounds among the population, with Fidesz registering increasing levels of popularity, [114] and xenophobia levels rising tremendously [115], even across the Roma minority, who voiced their support for the anti-migration campaign, although Roma themselves are victims of mass discrimination in Hungary. [116] In the domestic context, migrants were depicted as people who present a terroristic threat, disrespect the Hungarian culture, take away jobs from ordinary Hungarian people, and trigger unemployment. [117] Even after migrants stopped crossing through Hungary following the physical and legal closure of Hungary's southern borders in the autumn of 2015 [118] rejection levels not only remained high but continued to increase in the following years. [119] [120] Similar observations were recorded for other CEE EU member states, such as the Czech Republic, Estonia, and Lithuania, which just like Hungary expressed negative reactions towards migrants in 2015 and continued to do so in the years after. [121]

[109] Ibid.
[110] Schreier, C. (2015) 25 Years After: Mapping Civil Society in the Visegrád Countries, Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2015.
[111] Goździak, E. & Marton, P. (2018) Where the Wild Things Are: Fear of Islam and the Anti-Refugee Rhetoric in Hungary and in Poland, Central and Eastern European Migration Review, Vol. 7
[112] Bocskor, A. (2018) Anti-Immigration Discourses in Hungary during the 'Crisis' Year: The Orbán Government's 'National Consultation' Campaign of 2015, Sociology 2018, Vol. 52(3) 551–568
[113] Thorleifsson, C. (2017) Disposable strangers: far-right securitisation of forced migration in Hungary, Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale 25
[114] Ibid.
[115] Bíró-Nagy, A. (2021) Orbán's political jackpot: migration and the Hungarian electorate, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies.
[116] Glied, V. & Pap, N. (2016) The 'Christian Fortress of Hungary' The Anatomy of the Migration Crisis in Hungary, Yearbook of Polish European Studies 19:133-149.
[117] Bocskor, A. (2018) Anti-Immigration Discourses in Hungary during the 'Crisis' Year: The Orbán Government's 'National Consultation' Campaign of 2015, Sociology 2018, Vol. 52(3) 551–568
[118] Simonovits, B. (2016) Realistic and Symbolic Threats The Social Basis of Mass-Migration Related Fear in Contemporary Hungary, Review of Sociology 26(4): 53–73
[119] Barna, I. & Koltai, J. (2019) Attitude changes towards Immigrants in the Turbulent Years of the 'Migrant Crisis' and Anti-Immigrant Campaign in Hungary, Intersections. EEJSP 5(1): 48-70.
[120] Simonovits, B. (2020) The Public Perception of the Migration Crisis from the Hungarian Point of View: Evidence from the Field, in Geographies of Asylum in Europe and the Role of European Localities, Springer
[121] Messing, V. & Ságvári, B. (2019) Still divided but more open. Mapping European attitudes towards migration before and after the migration crisis, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

The 'complex set of state-propaganda techniques' [122] encompassed numerous types of manipulation [123], directed to the general public. The latter included, for instance, the installation of billboards across Hungary during the spring of 2015, all written in Hungarian, with some of the most common slogans being: '*If you come to Hungary, you need to respect our culture*!'[124], '*If you come to Hungary, you cannot take the jobs of Hungarians*!'. [125] Although the messages were directed towards the migrants, it became rather obvious that they were targeting the local population to influence public opinion on the issue of migration. [126] The billboard campaign coincided with more anti-migrant messages channelled through the mass media, such as: '*Did you know that Brussels wants to settle a city's worth of illegal immigrants in Hungary*?' [127] and '*Did you know that since the beginning of the immigration crisis, the harassment of women has risen sharply in Europe?*'. [128] The campaign also included a National Consultation on Migration and Terrorism (referred to by researchers as 'methodologically questionable propaganda' [129] and a 'pseudo-poll' [130]) which involved a questionnaire of 12 biased questions and implied answers, directly associating migration with terrorism [131], as suggested by the title of the Consultation as well. [132] The survey contained questions like '*There are some who think that economic migrants jeopardise the jobs and livelihoods of Hungarians. Do you agree?' [133]* and *'Do you think that Hungary could be the target of an act of terror in the next few years?'[134]* and was sent to every household in Hungary [135] between April and July 2015. [136] All these policies triggered a fear-based moral panic in the Hungarian society, based on the perceived danger of mass migration. [137] The government repeatedly communicated that Hungary will not be a host country for migrants, feeding the presumption that large masses of people are coming to settle down. [138]

During the summer, the number of crossings skyrocketed, with state officials reporting around 400,000 migrants on Hungarian territory, entering mainly through the southern border

[122] Simonovits, B. (2020) The Public Perception of the Migration Crisis from the Hungarian Point of View: Evidence from the Field, in Geographies of Asylum in Europe and the Role of European Localities, Springer
[123] Ibid
[124] Bíró-Nagy, A. (2021) Orbán's political jackpot: migration and the Hungarian electorate, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Porta, D. D. (2018) Solidarity Mobilizations in the 'Refugee Crisis': Contentious moves, Palgrave Studies in European Political Sociology
[128] Ibid.
[129] Szalai, A. & Gobl, G. (2015) Securitizing Migration in Contemporary Hungary, Central European University
[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Bocskor, A. (2018) Anti-Immigration Discourses in Hungary during the 'Crisis' Year: The Orbán Government's 'National Consultation' Campaign of 2015, Sociology 2018, Vol. 52(3) 551–568
[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Bozóki, A. & Cueva, S. (2021) Xenophobia and Power Politics: The Hungarian Far Right. in 'Anti-Genderismus in Europa: Allianzen von Rechtspopulismus und religiösem Fundamentalismus', pp. 109-120
[136] Bocskor, A. (2018) Anti-Immigration Discourses in Hungary during the 'Crisis' Year: The Orbán Government's 'National Consultation' Campaign of 2015, Sociology 2018, Vol. 52(3) 551–568
[137] Simonovits, B. (2020) The Public Perception of the Migration Crisis from the Hungarian Point of View: Evidence from the Field, in Geographies of Asylum in Europe and the Role of European Localities, Springer
[138] TÁRKI Social Research Institute (2016) The Social Aspects of The 2015 Migration crisis in Hungary

with Serbia. [139] Ultimately, Hungary was the country that recorded the highest number of migrants on a per capita basis out of all states in Europe [140], or 3317 first asylum applicants per 1 million residents [141] - a never seen before spike in the volume of migration. [142] In June, the government announced the investment of around € 97 million into constructing a 175 km-long razor wire fence alongside the Serbian border in an effort to deter migrants from entering Hungary (which would be later completed in September). [143] In July 2015, Hungary amended its Asylum Act and classified Serbia as a 'safe third country' (meaning that Hungary legalized sending back to Serbia all migrants who came from there), consequently denying almost all asylum requests. [144] The 'safe third country' principle which lies in the framework of the 'Dublin Regulation' that embodies EU's external migration policy, is based on the idea that a person seeking asylum could have found protection in another state, hence the receiving EU state can opt to decline to process the asylum claim. [145] [146] Based on this, a member state has the legal right to reject the asylum claim and declare the person inadmissible as a refugee. [147] The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has stated several times that Serbia cannot be considered 'safe' given its incompetent and unfair asylum procedures, therefore EU states should not return migrants to Serbia. [148] However, given the unbinding nature of UNHCR's recommendations and that the legal provisions of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) in force at the time allowed for each EU member state to individually compose its own national list of 'safe third countries', permitted Hungary to list Serbia as 'safe' and not accept asylum seekers from Serbia where they could have been given protection. [149]

Furthermore, the provisions of the 'Dublin Regulation' stipulate that all migrants are mandated to submit an asylum application and register in the EU state they arrive first, [150] a concept known as 'the first country of asylum.' [151] According to this provision, the country of first entry is the one responsible for processing the claim.[152] Additionally, under the Dublin Regulation an EU state is authorized to send an asylum seeker back to the member state which was the first state of entry if the former rules out that it is not responsible for handling the

[139] Bíró-Nagy, A. (2021) Orbán's political jackpot: migration and the Hungarian electorate, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies.
[140] Thorleifsson, C. (2017) Disposable strangers: far-right securitisation of forced migration in Hungary, Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale 25
[141] Keri, S. (2015) Suffering Has No Race or Nation: The Psychological Impact of the Refugee Crisis in Hungary and the Occurrence of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Soc. Sci. 2015, 4, 1079–1086
[142] Simonovits, B. (2016) Realistic and Symbolic Threats The Social Basis of Mass-Migration Related Fear in Contemporary Hungary, Review of Sociology 26(4): 53–73
[143] Szalai, A. & Gobl, G. (2015) Securitizing Migration in Contemporary Hungary, Central European University
[144] The Journal of the Central European Political Science Association (2017) Politics in Central Europe, Metropolitan University Prague
[145] Cortinovis, R. (2018) The Role and Limits of the Safe Third Country Concept in EU Asylum Policy, Research Social Platform on Migration and Asylum
[146] Davis. K. (2020) The European Union's Dublin regulation and the migrant crisis, Washington University Global Studies Law Review, Vol. 19, Issue 2
[147] Cortinovis, R. (2018) The Role and Limits of the Safe Third Country Concept in EU Asylum Policy, Research Social Platform on Migration and Asylum
[148] Zaviršek, D. & Rajgelj, B. (2019) Anti-Refugee Sentiment without Refugees: Human Rights Violations and Social Work in Post-Socialist Countries of Southeastern Europe in their Social Contexts, Journal of Human Rights and Social Work (2019) 4:5–16
[149] Cortinovis, R. (2018) The Role and Limits of the Safe Third Country Concept in EU Asylum Policy, Research Social Platform on Migration and Asylum
[150] Davis. K. (2020) The European Union's Dublin regulation and the migrant crisis, Washington University Global Studies Law Review, Vol. 19, Issue 2
[151] Cortinovis, R. (2018) The Role and Limits of the Safe Third Country Concept in EU Asylum Policy, Research Social Platform on Migration and Asylum
[152] Davis. K. (2020) The European Union's Dublin regulation and the migrant crisis, Washington University Global Studies Law Review, Vol. 19, Issue 2

application. [153] Hungary was often the first point of re-entry into the European Union for thousands of migrants after Greece [154] hence the Hungarian government called for the implementation of the 'first country of asylum' concept and stood against the right of an asylum seeker to self-choose his or her destination state. [155]

2.3 The 2015 Humanitarian miracle

Since the beginning of July 2015, state authorities did not permit migrants to board trains to other countries in Europe without possessing a valid Schengen visa. [156] Consequently, thousands of migrants across Hungary congregated around public spaces such as central stations and city centers, sometimes stuck for weeks, which made them extremely noticeable to the local population. [157] Some of the most well-known charities and humanitarian NGOs in Hungary were broadly criticised for failing to provide adequate help to the migrants, making these agencies 'invisible' during the summer when the migration flow to Hungary reached its climax. [158]

Regardless of the omnipresent anti-migrant atmosphere in Hungary pictured above, at the end of June, numerous informal grassroots volunteer-based groups started emerging in different cities across Hungary. These groups were organized through social media, Facebook in particular, and were formed by ordinary citizens who wanted to assist the migrants. [159] Social scientists observing the phenomena in Hungary performed a quantitative study and found that as much as 3% of Hungarians were involved with some kind of solidarity acts during the summer of 2015. [160] Considering the total population of Hungary in 2015 which accounted for 9.843 million people according to the World bank [161], around 294,000 people might have taken part in the migrant relief activities. As researchers from TARKI Social Research Institute underline, the voluntary movement may not be considered an exceptional phenomenon by itself, but when positioned in the domestic context of Hungary – a combination of highly xenophobic attitudes and a 'weak' civil sphere, the grassroots groups are more than 'worth

[153] Ibid.
[154] Gallai, S., Horváth, D. & Horváth-Sántha, H. (2017) Migration as a Political and Public Phenomenon: The Case of Hungary in 'The V4 Towards Migration Challenges in Europe An Analysis and Recommendations', Łódź University Press
[155] Ibid.
[156] Hoffman, T. (2022) Illegal Legality and the Facade of Good Faith – Migration and Law in Populist Hungary, Review of Central and East European Law 47
[157] TÁRKI Social Research Institute (2016) The Social Aspects of the 2015 Migration crisis in Hungary
[158] Ibid.
[159] Ibid.
[160] TÁRKI Social Research Institute (2016) The Social Aspects of the 2015 Migration crisis in Hungary
[161] World Bank (2023) Population, total – Hungary. [Online]. [Accessed on 10.04.2023]. Available from: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=HU

being studied.' [162] The number of volunteers for the newly formed grassroots groups outnumbered the workforce of many well-established humanitarian NGOs in Hungary, and in many cases, there was an oversupply of volunteers. [163] The voluntary wave was subsequently called the 'Hungarian humanitarian miracle', [164] a term used in scholarly literature to describe the 2015 events.

The first grassroots group – Migrant Solidarity Szeged (MigSzol Szeged) was established on the 25th of June 2015 [165], in the southern city of Szeged, and was the largest voluntary organisation outside the capital Budapest. [166] Szeged is a town with close proximity to Serbia and was often the first major city reached by migrants after crossing the border, while the citizens of Szeged were the first ones to witness the unfolding of the crisis in Hungary. [167] The main founder of the group – Mark Kékesi, at the time a social psychology lecturer at the University of Szeged, initiated the formation of the grassroots alongside 5 close friends from the local radio station. [168] After witnessing hundreds of people gathering around the town's railway station, without access to food, water, toilet, or medical assistance, the small group started bringing hot tea and blankets to the migrants, who according to the group members were left 'helpless.' [169] The group began to grow rapidly, forming a base of around 350 volunteers [170] and around 2500 Facebook group members. [171] MigSzol didn't have any strict membership rules, and anyone willing to help was welcomed to join without any formalities.[172] According to the group's own estimates, they assisted around 30,000 migrants in Szeged during the summer. [173] MigSzol received massive amounts of in-kind donations, including food, water, clothes, baby products, sleeping bags, medical and hygiene provisions, and all other first-aid supplies. [174] Most of the decision-making was done by the founding circle of people, and according to the volunteers, the organisation quickly built an impeccable workflow, which made the group work in a highly efficient manner. [175]

[162] TÁRKI Social Research Institute (2016) The Social Aspects of the 2015 Migration crisis in Hungary
[163] Ibid.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Ibid.
[166] Bernát, A., Kertész, A. & Toth, F.M. (2016) Solidarity Reloaded: Volunteer and Civilian Organisations during the Migration Crisis in Hungary, Review of Sociology 26(4): 29–52.
[167] TÁRKI Social Research Institute (2016) The Social Aspects of the 2015 Migration crisis in Hungary
[168] Interviewee Márk Kékesi, 21.01.2023, Budapest, Hungary
[169] Ibid.
[170] Ibid.
[171] Bernát, A. (2019) Solidarity powered via social media: Migrant solidarity grassroots groups in Hungary. In: Travlou, P. and Ciolfi, L. (Eds.). Ethnographies of Collaborative Economies Conference Proceedings. University of Edinburgh
[172] Svensson, S., Cartwright, A. & Balogh, P. (2017) Solidarity at the Border: The organisation of spontaneous support for transiting refugees in two Hungarian towns in the summer of 2015, Center for Policy Studies
[173] Ibid.
[174] Interviewee Márk Kékesi, 21.01.2023, Budapest, Hungary
[175] Svensson, S., Cartwright, A. & Balogh, P. (2017) Solidarity at the Border: The organisation of spontaneous support for transiting refugees in two Hungarian towns in the summer of 2015, Center for Policy Studies

A few days later, on the 29th of June, the Migration Aid Facebook group was created by Sándor Újhelyi, raising support for the migrants in Budapest. [176] When the government banned international train travel, the Keleti train station in the capital abruptly transformed into a hosting ground for around 5,000 people, waiting to board trains to Western Europe. [177] The sanitary conditions of the people were appalling, and the station quickly became a place where a lot of volunteers in Budapest quickly directed their attention to. [178] Migration Aid (MA) rapidly obtained more than 35,000 likes on Facebook [179] and more than 15,000 Facebook group members [180], becoming the biggest grassroots group considering the number of volunteers. [181] MA also had many subgroups created around the most important transport hubs in Budapest, including the MA Keleti (for coordination of volunteers on the Keleti railway station with 2,500 members), MA Nyugati (another railway station in Budapest, group with 2,900 members), MA Déli (a group with 1,200 members for Déli train station), and finally MA Debrecen, which was created in the eastern Hungarian city of Debrecen and had around 600 members. [182] The sheer size of the group and the subgroups attracted a lot of media coverage to Migration Aid, making them the most talked about grassroots organisation in the Hungarian media and an important agenda-setter during the crisis. [183] MA also had a designated spokesperson - Zsuzsanna Zsohár, who was responsible for presenting the organisation in front of journalists. [184] According to some calculations, throughout the most critical months of July and August, MA supported more than 100,000 migrants in Hungary, mobilizing thousands of volunteers, local and international donors, 3,000 doctors, and dedicating roughly 70,000 of non-paid, voluntary work. [185]

The example of Migrant Solidarity Szeged was also followed by other migrant relief enthusiasts in Budapest, who called their grassroots 'Let's Help Refugees Together' (Segítsünk Együtt a Menekülteknek, SEM).[186] Their Facebook group was founded around the same time as Migration Aid's, by the human rights expert Nóra Köves to help with the coordination of voluntary activities throughout Budapest. [187] The group initially provided assistance at Keleti railway station but re-oriented themselves to adjacent locations to avoid crowding and

[176] Szalai, A. & Gobl, G. (2015) Securitizing Migration in Contemporary Hungary, Central European University
[177] Porta, D. D. (2018) Solidarity Mobilizations in the 'Refugee Crisis': Contentious moves, Palgrave Studies in European Political Sociology
[178] Kallius, A., Monterescu, D. & Rajaram, P. (2016) Immobilizing mobility: Border ethnography, illiberal democracy, and the politics of the "refugee crisis" in Hungary, American ethnologist, Vol. 43
[179] TÁRKI Social Research Institute (2016) The Social Aspects of the 2015 Migration crisis in Hungary
[180] Interviewee Zsuzsanna Zsohár, 29.01.2023, Budapest, Hungary
[181] TÁRKI Social Research Institute (2016) The Social Aspects of the 2015 Migration crisis in Hungary
[182] Bernát, A. (2019) Solidarity powered via social media: Migrant solidarity grassroots groups in Hungary. In: Travlou, P. and Ciolfi, L. (Eds.). Ethnographies of Collaborative Economies Conference Proceedings. University of Edinburgh
[183] TÁRKI Social Research Institute (2016) The Social Aspects of the 2015 Migration crisis in Hungary
[184] Ibid.
[185] SOLIDAR (2016) Grassroots direct aid provision to asylum-seekers in Hungary
[186] László, L. (2016) The illegal kitchen spoon: the story of the Let's Help the Refugees Together group, Open Democracy. [Online]. [Accessed on 24.04.2023]. Available from https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/illegal-kitchen-spoon-story-of-lets-help-refugees-together-group/
[187] Ibid.

duplicate activities. [188] SEM's relief efforts were heavily focused on providing freshly cooked meals for the migrants and for this purpose they used a basement, located a few blocks away from Keleti station, which served as a headquarters, cooking, and storage station. [189] In their Facebook group, SEM acquired around 10,000 members, [190] with 2,700 more 'likes' on their page. [191] The donations which the group received were predominantly cooking ingredients and were directed to their headquarters, where some of the volunteers cooked, while others distributed the cooked food to the migrants. [192] As MigSzol Szeged, SEM had a couple of people who took the roles of main organisers, coordinating the donations, managing the communications with donors and between volunteers, and making other important decisions for the group. [193] These were Luca László – at the time a 19-year-old student in Budapest and Szilárd Kalmár – a social worker, working for a homeless shelter in the Hungarian capital. [194] As the organisation grew, they managed to serve hundreds of hot meals per day, provide bedsheets, and medical supplies to different migrant camping areas in Budapest, [195] as well as translators from Farsi and Arabic. [196]

2.4 Defining the 2015 voluntary movement

Given the magnitude of the 'Hungarian humanitarian miracle', it has been a subject of vast scholarly interest. The following section will provide a brief summary of those findings, as they will serve as an important foundation for the upcoming chapters.

Firstly, considering that 3% of the population participated in some kind of relief activities [197] with the target group of these activities being migrants [198], the voluntary wave may be regarded as a precedent in the recent Hungarian history of voluntarism, considering the high levels of xenophobia and exclusion of marginalized groups in the society. [199] Secondly, the 3 grassroots groups were established without any organisational history [200] and included

[188] TÁRKI Social Research Institute (2016) The Social Aspects of the 2015 Migration crisis in Hungary
[189] Interviewee Luca László, 05.01.2023, Budapest, Hungary
[190] TÁRKI Social Research Institute (2016) The Social Aspects of the 2015 Migration crisis in Hungary
[191] Interviewee Luca László, 05.01.2023, Budapest, Hungary
[192] Ibid.
[193] Ibid.
[194] Ibid.
[195] SOLIDAR (2016) Grassroots direct aid provision to asylum-seekers in Hungary
[196] Interviewee A.N., 25.01.2023, Budapest, Hungary
[197] TÁRKI Social Research Institute (2016) The Social Aspects of the 2015 Migration crisis in Hungary
[198] Bernát, A., Kertész, A. & Toth, F.M. (2016) Solidarity Reloaded: Volunteer and Civilian Organisations during the Migration Crisis in Hungary, Review of Sociology 26(4): 29–52.
[199] Ibid.
[200] Ibid.

thousands of non-paid participants most of whom didn't have experience volunteering for a humanitarian emergency [201] or prior experience volunteering in general. [202] In the beginning, the volunteers had no clear-cut roles – everyone was performing a different set of activities, and the organisational structure of the groups was fluid and informal, with all of them having some recognizable 'core members.' [203] However, even though many of the grassroots members included professionals in areas such as medicine, linguistics, and social services the activities of the groups, especially in their early phase, can be considered 'amateurish' taking into account their recent formation and the absence of explicit rules of operation. [204] People from numerous demographic and social backgrounds in Hungary took part in the voluntary movement, [205] while sociologists identified the following main motivational structures behind their reasons for participation: the first pillar consisted of people whose sympathy towards migrants and 'human desire' to relief their situation triggered their actions (motivated by solidarity). [206] The second motivational structure was people's own experience as refugees, either their own or of their family members (motivated by duty). [207] The third group of people was driven by their deep frustration over the anti-migrant policies of the Hungarian government and the social atmosphere in Hungary (motivated by outrage). [208] It's vital to note that 'outrage' is regarded as a leading trigger of collective action [209], an important factor whose relevance will prove crucial for the post-2015 development of the grassroots, explored in the upcoming chapters.

Most of the volunteers emphasized the non-political character of their humanitarian actions, [210] however, researchers have highlighted that in the particular anti-migrant environment in Hungary, even the simplest act of handing a sandwich to a migrant child can be considered an act against the regime, therefore political. [211] According to Bernát, Kertész, and Toth (2016) the grassroots groups 'acted as a counter-power to government policies' [212] to which the majority of Hungarians subscribed. [213] The voluntary organisations can also be

[201] Kallius, A. (2019) Solidarity in Transit, in 'Challenging the Political Across Borders: Migrants' and Solidarity Struggles', Budapest Center for Policy Studies, Central European University
[202] TÁRKI Social Research Institute (2016) The Social Aspects of the 2015 Migration crisis in Hungary
[203] Ibid.
[204] Ibid.
[205] Bernát, A., Kertész, A. & Toth, F.M. (2016) Solidarity Reloaded: Volunteer and Civilian Organisations during the Migration Crisis in Hungary, Review of Sociology 26(4): 29–52.
[206] TÁRKI Social Research Institute (2016) The Social Aspects of the 2015 Migration crisis in Hungary
[207] Ibid.
[208] Ibid.
[209] Ibid.
[210] Ibid.
[211] Majtényi, B., Kopper, A & Susánszky, P. (2019) Constitutional othering, ambiguity, and subjective risks of mobilization in Hungary: examples from the migration crisis, Democratization, 26:2, 173-189
[212] Bernát, A., Kertész, A. & Toth, F.M. (2016) Solidarity Reloaded: Volunteer and Civilian Organisations during the Migration Crisis in Hungary, Review of Sociology 26(4): 29–52.
[213] Svensson, S., Cartwright, A. & Balogh, P. (2017) Solidarity at the Border: The organisation of spontaneous support for transiting refugees in two Hungarian towns in the summer of 2015, Center for Policy Studies

framed as alternative 'communication platforms' [214] for the people who opposed the hateful rhetoric stemming from the government [215], a pro-migrant counterpublic. [216] Volunteers reported how their common efforts led to the emergence of a sense of community, which translated into a 'we-feeling' as opposed to the remaining part of the society, perceived as hostile. [217] In addition, a lot of members of the different grassroots groups said they were verbally and physically harassed by ordinary Hungarian citizens while performing aid activities. [218] [219] Volunteers were blacklisted in the public discourse as 'enemies of the nation'[220], whose pro-migrant attitudes present a security threat to Hungary. [221]

The situation changed drastically after the border fence with Serbia – the main entry point for migrants into Hungary [222] - was completed on the 15th of September 2015. According to the volunteers, migrants almost completely disappeared from the streets of Hungary from one day to another. [223] The migration route deviated towards Croatia, so the Hungarian government accelerated the construction of a fence on the Croatian border as well. [224] The second fence was finalized on the 16th of October 2015 and all border crossings were shut down, signaling the end of mass migration inflow to Hungary. [225] The border closures were followed by the creation of the so-called 'transit zones' at the border areas, which served as detention centers for migrants [226] becoming the only place where they were allowed to lodge an asylum application. [227] The living conditions of those centers were denounced by several human rights organisations [228] while the Hungarian government was broadly criticized by the European Court of Human Rights and the UN High Commission for Human Rights over numerous reports of migrant mistreatment at the transit zones. [229] Amendments in the Hungarian Penal Code voted by the parliament during that period, made 'illegal border

[214] Bernát, A. (2019) Solidarity powered via social media: Migrant solidarity grassroots groups in Hungary. In: Travlou, P. and Ciolfi, L. (Eds.). Ethnographies of Collaborative Economies Conference Proceedings. University of Edinburgh
[215] Ibid.
[216] Dessewffy, T., Nagy, Z. & Vary, D. (2017) Where Are Those Better Angels of Our Society? Subaltern Counterpublics in Hungary During the Refugee Crisis, Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society 2017, Vol. 37(2) 112–123
[217] Svensson, S., Cartwright, A. & Balogh, P. (2017) Solidarity at the Border: The organisation of spontaneous support for transiting refugees in two Hungarian towns in the summer of 2015, Center for Policy Studies
[218] Kende, A., Lantos, N. A., Belinszky, A., Csaba, S., & Lukács, Z. A. (2017) The Politicized Motivations of Volunteers in the Refugee Crisis: Intergroup Helping as the Means to Achieve Social Change. Journal of Social and Political Psychology, 5(1), 260-281.
[219] Bernát, A., Kertész, A. & Toth, F.M. (2016) Solidarity Reloaded: Volunteer and Civilian Organisations during the Migration Crisis in Hungary, Review of Sociology 26(4): 29–52.
[220] Timmer, A. & Docka-Filipek, D. (2018) Enemies of the Nation: Understanding the Hungarian State's Relationship to Humanitarian NGOs, " Journal of International and Global Studies: Vol. 9: No. 2, Article 3.
[221] Bernát, A., Kertész, A. & Toth, F.M. (2016) Solidarity Reloaded: Volunteer and Civilian Organisations during the Migration Crisis in Hungary, Review of Sociology 26(4): 29–52.
[222] The Journal of the Central European Political Science Association (2017) Politics in Central Europe, Metropolitan University Prague
[223] László, L. (2016) The illegal kitchen spoon: the story of the Let's Help the Refugees Together group, Open Democracy. [Online]. [Accessed on 24.04.2023]. Available from https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/illegal-kitchen-spoon-story-of-lets-help-refugees-together-group/
[224] Piazza-Georgi, B. (2016) Living Our Values, Preserving Our Values: Hungary's Response to the 2015 European Migrant Crisis – Part I". Hungarian Review 02:37-50
[225] TÁRKI Social Research Institute (2016) The Social Aspects of the 2015 Migration crisis in Hungary
[226] Bender, F. (2020) Abolishing asylum and violating the human rights of refugees. Why is it tolerated? The case of Hungary in the EU, in 'Europe and the Refugee Response. A Crisis of Values?', pp.59-72
[227] Vékony, D. (2019) Country Profile Hungary, Radicalisation, Secularism and the Governance of Religion: Bringing together European and Asian Perspectives (GREASE)
[228] Aradi, E. (2017) Attitudes towards Immigration in Hungary in Light of the Migration and Refugee Crisis in 2015, Utrecht University
[229] Vékony, D. (2019) Country Profile Hungary, Radicalisation, Secularism and the Governance of Religion: Bringing together European and Asian Perspectives (GREASE)

crossings' and 'border fence damages' crimes, punishable with 3 and 5 years of imprisonment respectively. [230]

The abrupt stop of the migration flow to Hungary came at a time when volunteer mobilization was reaching its highest point. [231] All public places where migrants gathered quickly emptied - consequently, the target group of the entire migrant relief movement vanished, vastly dismantling the role of the grassroots organisations. [232] The question of what happened to the grassroots after the autumn of 2015 has been addressed by a couple of researchers in Hungary, but not in detail. It has been noted that the dilemma of what to do next was present in the 3 groups, all of which had aspirations 'for a longer future' [233] as well as that all grassroots organisations continued with different activities for a relatively short period after the borders were closed. [234] However, the concrete circumstances behind their 'survival' or closure in the period after remain largely unanswered.

The following sections of this thesis will thoroughly explore the groups' endeavours post the autumn of 2015, as well as the reasoning behind the continuation or the termination of the grassroots organisations, filling this gap currently present in the literature. As Uifalean (2015) states, the 2015 Hungarian grassroots groups are a phenomenon that 'deserves more attention and a detailed analysis in the future.' [235]

[230] Stivas, D. (2021) The art of securitising. Orbán's handling of the European refugee crisis, Journal of Contemporary European Studies
[231] Timmer, A. (2017) Responding to the Crisis: Humanitarian Aid to Refugees and Migrants in Hungary, Bulletin of the General Anthropology Division, Volume 24, No. 2
[232] Ibid.
[233] TÁRKI Social Research Institute (2016) The Social Aspects of the 2015 Migration crisis in Hungary
[234] Ibid.
[235] Uifalean, G. (2015) European NGO's and the Refugee Crisis, Journal of Global Politics and Current Diplomacy 2:41-53.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

3.1 Citizen Aid and Grassroots Humanitarianism

In order to empirically examine the three grassroots organisations in the described direction, the thesis will build on two main theoretical frameworks. The first one embodies the concepts of citizen aid and grassroots humanitarianism. As Fechter & Schwittay (2019) indicate, these umbrella terms are best described as 'Forms of aid and development, which are not orchestrated by large donors or aid agencies but are initiated by ordinary citizens […] providing assistance to others in need. With a focus on humanitarianism, they have been labelled 'grassroots humanitarians' […] They exist as small-scale civil society actors who respond to local needs or shared interests rather than policy directives.' [236] The authors highlight the European migration crisis as an event which has set off a rise in citizen aid activities. [237] However, citizen aid can be characterized as 'an unstable category' [238] which designates 'a set of practices that are dynamic and often temporally limited' [239] : 'While some of these initiatives may, over time, incorporate themselves as NGOs, others stay small, downsize, or cease to exist, and studying such processes of formalisation or their absence can yield important insights into how citizen aid evolves.' [240] When it comes to grassroots humanitarianism, it's a type of citizen aid which is situated around locations of humanitarian emergencies and natural disasters, such as the 2015 Migration crisis in Europe, a 'fertile ground for emergent practices of citizen aid and their analysis.' [241]

Grassroots humanitarianism in the particular environment of a migration crisis possesses distinctive characteristics, namely its spontaneous inception, the informality of the groups particularly in the early phase of their operation, the presence of grassroots volunteers working independently from the well-established organisations in humanitarian work, responding to the needs of migrants as they emerge. [242] Citizen aid involves unpaid labour, with volunteers relying on their own funds to sustain the group's operation while they can have another job as a stable source of income. [243] When moving from an informal to a formal way

[236] Fechter, A. & Schwittay, A. (2019) Citizen aid: grassroots interventions in development and humanitarianism, Third World Quarterly vol. 40
[237] Ibid.
[238] Ibid.
[239] Ibid.
[240] Ibid.
[241] Ibid.
[242] Ibid.
[243] Ibid.

of operations (for instance by legally registering as an NGO), issues such as bureaucratization, power and hierarchy inequalities may arise. [244]

3.2 The Success factors of grassroots initiatives

Grassroots projects operate in the realm of civil society and can be the source of bottom-up, community-led solutions to different local problems that affect marginalized parts of society. [245] Researchers have classified some of the issues that affect these citizen aid initiatives, such as their ability to come forward with novel ideas, but their inability to upscale and reach further market grounds. [246] Therefore, the vital questions of why some 'succeed', and others 'fail' are often neglected and not carefully analyzed in the scholarly literature, a negative practice which 'leads to missed opportunities of corrective learning.' [247] Grassroots initiatives, regardless of their form, are sources of collective action that involves dedicated participants who incite social learning – an activity with strong potential to bring societal change and evolution. [248]

The second theoretical foundation will be based on the work of Grabs, Langen, Maschkowski, and Schäpke (2016) who in their comprehensive research of grassroots initiatives (GRIs), explored the 'success factors' which substantially influence the long-term survival, development, and effectiveness of grassroots initiatives. [249] The scholars interconnected and juxtaposed findings from various research disciplines, completing an innovative interdisciplinary analysis of explanatory components for GRIs' prosperity. [250] The factors can be applied to an extensive pool of different GRIs and can be empirically tested in fieldwork for a thorough investigation of their development. [251]

GRIs are positioned in the domain of social mobilization and there is a positive correlation between grassroots' success and societal development. [252] The term 'success' is conceptualized as 'the initiative's ability to engage in processes beneficial to broad-scale

[244] Ibid.
[245] Dana, L., Gurău C., Hoy, F., Ramadanic, V. & Alexander, T. (2019) Success factors and challenges of grassroots innovations: Learning from failure, Journal of Technological Forecasting & Social Change 164 (2021)
[246] Ibid.
[247] Ibid.
[248] Ibid.
[249] Grabs, J., Langen, N., Maschkowski, G. & Schäpke, N. (2016) Understanding role models for change: a multilevel analysis of success factors of grassroots initiatives for sustainable consumption, Journal of Cleaner Production, Vol.134
[250] Ibid.
[251] Ibid.
[252] Ibid.

change' and thereby survive in the long run. [253] Other scholars researching GRIs have noted that 'success' in the field of grassroots initiatives can furthermore be evaluated by the achievement of tangible results in the target community, such as general improvements in the quality of life, alleviation of poverty, or increased learning and working opportunities. [254] On the other hand, according to Grabs, Langen, Maschkowski, and Schäpke (2016) when GRIs lack the resources to transform into a larger context, they remain 'a fascinating, but a marginalized phenomenon.' [255] Dana, Gurău, Hoy, Ramadanic, and Alexander (2019) elaborate that when grassroots projects 'fail' – when their further development is unsuccessful and they are unable to assist their target community – the 'loss of time, money, and human resources' [256] often demotivates the people engaged with such initiatives. [257]

Based on the work of Grabs, Langen, Maschkowski, and Schäpke (2016) the GRI 'success factors' include but are not limited to the following:

1) **Having a sense of urgency** – serves as an incentive to get involved in collective action. Certain kinds of events can attract public attention, provoke a sense of urgency and an impulse to look for collective solutions. When those events involve well-publicised occurrences, they can result in public outrage. At the same time, people who share similar worldviews influence their feeling of 'urgency for action' even further.
2) **Feelings of empathy and responsibility** – The empathic identification with vulnerable people as fellow humans is required to provoke action. The feelings of personal responsibility and the belief that individual action has the power to change a given situation solidify the solidaristic and altruistic emotions.
3) **Feeling of (collective) self-efficacy** – This factor is considered as the most prevalent when it comes to one's personal agency and embodies the conviction that people have control over their surrounding environment, can achieve the desired goals, and make change. Individuals are reluctant to take action if the challenge is perceived as too overwhelming.
4) **Positive outcome expectations** – this factor encompasses the optimism that one's efforts are going to be effective, as well as the confidence that a situation can be modified at low

[253] Ibid
[254] Dana, L., Gurău C., Hoy, F., Ramadanic, V. & Alexander, T. (2019) Success factors and challenges of grassroots innovations: Learning from failure, Journal of Technological Forecasting & Social Change 164 (2021)
[255] Grabs, J., Langen, N., Maschkowski, G. & Schäpke, N. (2016) Understanding role models for change: a multilevel analysis of success factors of grassroots initiatives for sustainable consumption, Journal of Cleaner Production, Vol.134
[256] Dana, L., Gurău C., Hoy, F., Ramadanic, V. & Alexander, T. (2019) Success factors and challenges of grassroots innovations: Learning from failure, Journal of Technological Forecasting & Social Change 164 (2021)
[257] Ibid.

costs. Taking part in a GRI may also boost one's expectations for an increased quality of life.

5) **Organisational resources** – these include both material resources (such as money, number of volunteers, funding opportunities, and infrastructure) and non-material resources (like time and availability of volunteers and leaders, moral engagement, intergroup trust, and good intergroup communication). The ability of a grassroots organisation to continue operations and its capacity to influence any situation is greatly affected by the two types of resources, which the group uses to sustain its operation.
6) **The legal status of the organisation** – formally institutionalizing a grassroots group may be of paramount significance regarding GRIs' success by increasing the trust between members and their commitment to the group's goals, by improving the group's outreach capabilities, and attracting more funding.
7) **Leadership** – powerful and efficient leadership is fundamental for ensuring an amicable and conflict-free intergroup climate, the smooth implementation of the group's projects, and adequate decision-making in GRIs best interest. The leader(s) must act in a professional manner, showcase competence, and devotion to the cause to keep the group flourishing.
8) **Common goal and expectations (collective vision)** – all people in the organisation must identify with a collective goal, recognized by the whole group as such, ideally via a transparent process of goal setting**.** Having a collective vision strengthens the community ties between members who come from various social backgrounds and makes them look beyond the boundaries of their self-interest.
9) **Contacts with external stakeholders** – these include connections to businesses, the government, and other civil society organisations that work in the same field, as well as GRIs' ability to manage outside communications and its reputation in a good manner. It's of particular importance that GRIs maintain collaborative relationships with networks of similar GRIs, which helps them to exchange know-how and motivate each other.

The 'success' factors are interconnected and influence one another. [258] The authors note that while examining particular GRIs, some factors may be 'present', while others could be 'absent' – therefore the components which influence 'success' may not be simultaneously

[258] Grabs, J., Langen, N., Maschkowski, G. & Schäpke, N. (2016) Understanding role models for change: a multilevel analysis of success factors of grassroots initiatives for sustainable consumption, Journal of Cleaner Production, Vol.134

identified in a single case. [259] The non-presence of a factor may signify the aspects in which the grassroots initiative faces drawbacks in development. [260]

As Grabs, Langen, Maschkowski, and Schäpke (2016) state, successful grassroots organisations possess the capability to voice alternative behavioral and social norms and bring change on a societal level. [261] However, GRIs' potential to influence a shift on a societal level is greatly affected by the specific context in which they operate, which can diminish their development and ability to advocate for alternative ideas. [262] This is why when examining grassroots initiatives in a given setting, researchers have to take into account the particularity of the environment in which they exist, with the authors suggesting that there may be other factors, which can have a positive or a negative impact on their growth. [263]

The remaining part of this thesis will first discuss in detail the methodological approach used to answer the main research question and then present the empirical findings concerning GRIs in humanitarian action, considering the imprint of the Hungarian political and social context. Ultimately, the upcoming empirical chapter will test in fieldwork the extent to which the above-mentioned factors have sculpted the faith of the 3 GRIs subject of this research, resulting either in their success or in their collapse. Moreover, as the authors of the second analytical framework suggest, carefully examining the specifics of the Hungarian case led to the emergence of other factors which influenced local GRIs' evolution.

[259] Ibid.
[260] Ibid.
[261] Ibid.
[262] Ibid.
[263] Ibid.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY & DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Selection and recruitment of participants

As remarked in Chapter 2, the voluntary movement is regarded as a counterpublic to the government's anti-migrant rhetoric and the larger part of the Hungarian society, which adopted the narrative. [264] [265] Methodologically, such kind of counterpublics present an immense challenge to researchers, as they are classified as 'hard to survey populations.' [266] These groups encompass small parts of the societal body and therefore are 'hard to identify, hard to contact, and hard to convince for an interview.' [267]

In order to thoroughly investigate the topic in an unbiased manner, I selected target interviewees from 3 different categories: firstly, former or current leaders and/or volunteers from the 3 grassroots organisations. Secondly, social workers, researchers, and leaders of well-established NGOs in the arena of humanitarianism and human rights in Hungary and finally, academia representatives from Hungary and abroad who have been following the historical and current developments of the Hungarian civil society. The primary source of information that will serve as an answer to the research question will be the insights from past/current volunteers and leaders and their first-hand experiences concerning the development of their respective organisations. The decision to include the other two groups of interviewees is justified by the fact that having an 'outsider' look at why the grassroots disintegrated or continued to exist can provide an important alternative perspective, which could have otherwise been omitted. The initial recruitment process began with contacting the former/current leaders of the 3 grassroots via email, whose addresses were located on online platforms, either on the official web pages of the grassroots (some of the websites are still operational) or on their social media pages (Facebook). While doing my literature review, I identified the some of the most commonly mentioned NGOs, research institutions, and scholars that have been involved in observing the 2015 humanitarian wave/the civil sector in Hungary, including Menedék – Hungarian Association for Migrants (Migránsokat segítő egyesület), the Hungarian Helsinki Committee, the TARKI Social Research Institute in Budapest, the Institute for minority studies in Budapest

[264] Svensson, S., Cartwright, A. & Balogh, P. (2017) Solidarity at the Border: The organisation of spontaneous support for transiting refugees in two Hungarian towns in the summer of 2015, Center for Policy Studies
[265] Dessewffy, T., Nagy, Z. & Vary, D. (2017) Where Are Those Better Angels of Our Society? Subaltern Counterpublics in Hungary During the Refugee Crisis, Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society 2017, Vol. 37(2) 112–123
[266] Ibid.
[267] Ibid.

of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and several university scholars. In the end, 13 participants were recruited to participate in this research, namely 3 former leaders of each of the grassroots, 5 volunteers (3 from Migration Aid, 1 from SEM, and 1 from MigSzol Szeged), 3 representatives from the above-mentioned NGOs, and research institutes (one is also a volunteer) and 2 scholars.

4.2 Data collection & Analysis

The empirical phase of the thesis employs interviews as a central method of primary data collection considering the qualitative research design. [268] When aiming to investigate social phenomena which have not been explored in detail before interviews are acknowledged as the most suitable qualitative method for finding an answer to the research question(s). [269] Regarding the type of interviews, a semi-structured in-depth interview was conducted with each of the participants, either face-to-face or via Zoom. Most of the fieldwork was carried out by scheduling in-person meetings with the interviewees in Hungary over the period of two months. The preference to select semi-structured interviews rather than structured ones is explained by the specifics of the topic. Since this particular aspect of the issue has not been explored in detail before, the open-ended, flexible, and prolonged form of the semi-structured interviews was preferred over the rigidness and briefness of the rather 'tense' structured interviews. [270] A significant advantage of semi-structured interviews is the opportunity to add additional questions during the course of the interview alongside the initial set of talking points, addressing novel issues raised by the interviewee. [271]

The thesis follows an inductive logic and research design, where the researcher originates meaning from the data gathered during the fieldwork. [272] The data is later used to construct themes and categories from the bottom-up, in a way that allows the generated groupings to fit into an existing theoretical foundation, but not be restricted to it. [273] In other words, the categories that have emerged in the empirical study have to be compared to the available literature, but the nature of the research allows for modifications and adjustments of

[268] Adhabi, E. & Anozie, C. (2017) Literature Review for the Type of Interview in Qualitative Research, International Journal of Education, Vol. 9, No. 3
[269] Gill, P., Stewart, K., Treasure, E. & Chadwick, B. (2008) Methods of data collection in qualitative research: interviews and focus groups. British Dental Journal, Vol. 204
[270] Adhabi, E. & Anozie, C. (2017) Literature Review for the Type of Interview in Qualitative Research, International Journal of Education, Vol. 9, No. 3
[271] Ibid.
[272] Creswell, J. (2009) Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches, Third edition
[273] Ibid.

the theoretical framework, depending on the information provided by the participants. [274] Since the existing scholarship must not be the sole 'container' into which the new data is positioned[275], the findings of this research will serve for confirmation and modification of categories that have already been developed in previous theory, a process relevant for a qualitative research design which involves coding as a methodological method. [276] Consequently, this thesis will suggest new analytical aspects, complementing the literature concerning the evolution of grassroots initiatives.

Firstly, after the process of collecting the data was finalised, the interviews were transcribed precisely line-by-line. For obtaining maximum accuracy in qualitative research, I performed a 'corrective listening' of every recording to rectify any errors. [277] In the next phase, a qualitative data analysis (QDA) was carried out, by using the method of manual open coding. The manual open coding content analysis involves thoroughly scanning the available pieces of information (in this case interviews) multiple times without the help of software to extract relevant to the research question codes or concepts (sections of the data which the researcher marks as important, such as different actions, ideas or events). [278] In the next stage of the analysis, all codes identified from each of the interview transcripts are juxtaposed to one another in order to discover similarities (dominant tendencies) [279] and place the codes into distinct analytical categories, 'based on common properties.' [280] These conceptual categories generate a preliminary framework, on which the subsequent analysis will build on. [281] Even though the process of manually open coding data is extremely time-consuming, the process guarantees the validity of the results since the information is derived from raw data. [282] After the open coding was concluded, a set of 10 categories was completed, which in the empirical analysis will serve as factors that influenced the futures of Migration Aid, Let's Help Refugees Together, and MigSzol Szeged after the Migration crisis in Hungary de facto ended following the closures of the borders in the autumn of 2015. [283]

[274] Ibid.
[275] Ibid.
[276] Flick, U., Kardorff, E. & Steinke, I. (2004) A Companion to qualitative research, SAGE Publications
[277] Ibid
[278] Khandkar, S. (2009) Open Coding, University of Calgary
[279] Flick, U., Kardorff, E. & Steinke, I. (2004) A Companion to qualitative research, SAGE Publications
[280] Khandkar, S. (2009) Open Coding, University of Calgary
[281] Ibid.
[282] Ibid.
[283] Simonovits, B. (2016) Realistic and Symbolic Threats The Social Basis of Mass-Migration Related Fear in Contemporary Hungary, Review of Sociology 26(4): 53–73

4.3 Limitations

As in any other research, a number of limitations impacting the methods have to be considered. First of all, and most importantly, regardless of the precision, accuracy, and detail in which single-country studies are conducted, their ability to apply the findings at a global level is severely challenged. [284] This restriction is explained by the fact that every country possesses historical, political, economic, and cultural characteristics, which are unique to the case and may not be valid for other states. [285] This study does not claim to be representative, nor that the results presented in the following chapter can serve as generalizations for other cases, beyond the one of Hungary. Nevertheless, this study contributes to the scholarship which examines the evolution of grassroots initiatives in humanitarianism by suggesting new analytical angles concerning phenomena that are significantly 'understudied', 'undertheorized', and unrepresented in academia. [286]

Secondly, my limited knowledge of Hungarian did not allow for the interviews to be administered in the mother tongue of the participants. Although the nature of interviewees' past or present work (as volunteers/leaders working with migrants, members of well-known NGOs and academics) requires proficiency in English which they sufficiently demonstrated during our meetings, the opportunity to express themselves in Hungarian might have allowed me to grasp additional meanings and interpretations, which might have been omitted by speaking in English - the sole language used during my fieldwork. Nevertheless, the sample of possible participants was not limited by language barriers – all the people I contacted understood English, regardless of their acceptance or refusal to participate in the research.

The initial selection process of interviewees aimed for recruiting the same number of participants for each of the grassroots organisations, as well as people who represented different positions in the groups' hierarchy (for instance as volunteers or as leaders) to provide maximum trustworthiness and reliability of the data. Both parameters are almost entirely fulfilled, with the exception that the current (as of 2023) leadership and decision-making body of Migration Aid Budapest declined to participate in the research, after being invited to do so over the course of 3 months. However, such an outcome was not unexpected, since the research targets societal segments that are methodologically difficult to recruit and convince to be

[284] Landmann, T. (2008) Issues and methods in comparative politics: an introduction, Third Edition
[285] Ibid.
[286] Fechter, A. & Schwittay, A. (2019) Citizen aid: grassroots interventions in development and humanitarianism, Third World Quarterly vol. 40

interviewed. As a consequence, this research will base its findings on the personal experiences of one current volunteer for Migration Aid Budapest and three past members, one of whom took a leadership-like role during the peak of the events in 2015 and left the organisation in 2016 but continued to closely monitor its development until the present day.

There was no selection bias with regards to the formulation of the final pool of interviewees – everyone who agreed to take part in the research was given the opportunity to do so, regardless of their sex, ethnic origin, political views, religion, or any other type of personal characteristics. All participants were presented with equal conditions for the completion of the empirical work, including the same time frame to speak (approximately 1 hour and a half for each interview), an identical base of open-ended questions, and additional personalized ones, tailored to address the specifics of one's organisation and occupation, as well as with the possibility to choose the location of the interview to ensure participants' maximum comfort.

Another possible limitation would be that the nature of the research question required participants to recollect and delineate experiences, which may have occurred years prior to our conversations, something that may impact the reliability of the data. However, many of the interviewees' individual observations coincide, strengthening the integrity of the data and assuring both the presence of a phenomenon and its trustworthiness.

CHAPTER 5: EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

Following the completion of the manual open coding and the subsequent identification of categorial units, the following distinctive categories were formulated as an answer to the main research question: *What are the main factors which contributed to the success or failure of the 3 solidarity grassroots initiatives after the end of the 2015 Migration crisis in Hungary?* The following table (**Fig.1**) illustrates the empirical findings of this thesis and how they correlate with the GRI 'success factors', outlined in the Theoretical framework chapter. Two additional factors are included – 9. Mental health and 10. Legal barriers, which are not explicitly distinguished as 'success factors' in Chapter 4, but have been labeled as crucially important by participants in understanding particular aspects from their experiences that impacted the development of the grassroots groups in one way or another:

CATEGORIES IDENTIFIED IN THE EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS:	**GRI 'SUCCESS FACTORS':**
1. Official (legal) registration (as an NGO)	Legal status of the organisation
2. Strong leadership	Leadership
3. Money issues	Organisational resources
4. Relationship with the other grassroots & the government	Contacts with external stakeholders
5. Outflow of workforce and donations	Organisational resources
6. Group reorganisation (efforts to direct the group's aid activities towards other vulnerable groups in Hungary after the migrants stopped coming)	Feelings of empathy and responsibility, (collective) self-efficacy & positive outcome expectations
7. Internal conflicts & personal agenda pushing	Collective vision

8. The 'Crisis' factor & personal responsibility	Feeling a sense of urgency, (collective) self-efficacy & positive outcome expectations
9. **Mental health** (including trauma and burnouts from assisting in a humanitarian emergency**,** and family related issues)	*Additionally suggested factors impacting GRIs' success.*
10. **Legal barriers** (the impact of anti-civil society laws)	*Additionally suggested factors impacting GRIs' success.*

Fig. 1

As mentioned before, after the migration flow to Hungary came to a halt in October 2015, all 3 of the grassroots organisations started to contemplate what to do next, as the target group of their humanitarian efforts had abruptly disappeared. [287]At the same time, the initiatives were the main protagonists of the 'Hungarian humanitarian miracle', involving hundreds of thousands of people across the country. [288] The following part of this thesis will present in detail the empirical findings, which depict the post-crisis identity, material and organisational struggles of Migration Aid (MA), Let's Help Refugees Together (SEM), and MigSzol Szeged, many of which they shared in common. Nevertheless, while MA managed to overcome these obstacles and continue functioning as an organisation until the present day, MigSzol Szeged and SEM ceased to exist in 2017 and 2018 respectively.

5.1 Official registration

One of the main reasons why internal discussions were held in each one of the GRIs whether to register legally as an NGO, was because a substantial part of the aid activities they performed were illegal, as testified by volunteers. These included cooking thousands of portions of food without possessing the required clearance from the health authorities, collecting huge amounts of unregistered donations from Hungary and abroad, including a lot of money, which was often received in the personal bank accounts of the leaders, risking being prosecuted by the tax authorities.

[287] TÁRKI Social Research Institute (2016) The Social Aspects of the 2015 Migration crisis in Hungary
[288] Ibid.

The Let's Help Refugees Together group first pondered about registering legally as an association right after the summer of 2015. However, they only managed to do so in 2017 - a move not supported by the entirety of the group:

> *'Being able to receive money legally was the main reason we pursued the registration - otherwise, nobody missed having a big organisational structure. We also found that it's hard to make ourselves be taken seriously when it comes to negotiations if we remain a Facebook group. However, we didn't have the time or the knowledge about how to become an organisation [...] It took a long time to do the registration through the courts in Hungary, but also to gather the documents, and to come up with the idea of what our mission is going to be. By the time it actually happened it was irrelevant – most of the members were not interested anymore and it's sad because we all had really big hopes after 2015 of what is going to happen with our organisation.'* [289]
>
> *Luca László, former Vice president of SEM*

Another former volunteer for the group shared that when SEM had meetings to discuss the idea of formally institutionalizing, the members still felt as a 'successful' group. Even though that technically it wasn't a legally registered organisation (not until 2017), according to interviewees the group had an impeccable working symbiosis and structure, so the registration felt like a redundant step by some:

> *'We had this bottom-up experience, an extremely successful experience that we are able to mobilise sources to cooperate with each other. The simpleness and the stability we had at that moment was very important and some people were openly against institutionalizing the initiative.'* [290]
>
> *A.N., a former volunteer for SEM*

The leaders and volunteers of MigSzol Szeged also deliberated over registering, but in the end, decided not to go forward with it:

> '*We were thinking about registering officially almost every day. It certainly has some advantages - we could easily receive donations or do paperwork. However, we were always an informal group, and, in the end, we never registered.'* [291]
>
> *Mark Kékesi, founder, and leader of MigSzol Szeged*

[289] Interviewee Luca László, 05.01.2023, Budapest, Hungary
[290] Interviewee A.N., 25.01.2023, Budapest, Hungary
[291] Interviewee Mark Kékesi, 21.01.2023, Budapest, Hungary

Tamás Szüts, a former volunteer for MigSzol Szeged who took part in activities of Migration Aid, recollected that a lot of the MigSzol's members were not as enthusiastic to become official as well. [292]

Contrary to SEM and MigSzol, the majority of the people in Migration Aid supported the group's institutionalization. Judit Szikra, who volunteered for MA during the 2015 Crisis, remembered a meeting in late September 2015 that summoned all members to debate the group's future, and only a month later, MA registered as an NGO in the United Kingdom. [293] The decision not to initially register under Hungary's jurisdiction was taken because the group members 'didn't trust the Hungarian system', explained Anikó Bernát - Sociologist and researcher in the area of migration in TARKI Social Research Institute of Budapest, whose work has been heavily focused on the 'Hungarian humanitarian miracle.' [294] Ms. Bernát is also currently a volunteer for Migration Aid, assisting the NGO in the ongoing Ukrainian refugee crisis.

The former spokesperson of MA – Zsuzsanna Zsohár, whose name was among the founders of the NGO in the UK, confirms that the group wanted to register in a place where the 'Hungarian government had no reach.' [295] However, the UK NGO was later on disbanded because according to Ms. Zsohár, it was dangerous to have your name legally present in the documentation of an NGO dealing with migrants in Hungary, an issue which will be addressed in detail later when discussing the category of 'legal barriers.' As of 2023, Migration Aid is registered in Hungary under the name of 'The Helpers Association.' [296]

Sara Svensson – an associate professor in political science at Halmstad University, Sweden, also worked at the Central European University (CEU) in Budapest for many years, where her academic duties often involved numerous projects researching the civil sector in Hungary. Drawing from her own experience of participating in CEU's trade union – a form of civil society organisation, Prof. Svensson remarked:

> *'[In Hungary] it's a lot of bureaucracy, this is a huge structural problem. The amount of work it takes if you just want to change the president [of your organisation] involves weeks, months of labour to go to your lawyer, to your banks, to the courts, to hand in all the papers […] How can a small association of volunteers overcome, manage, and take financial responsibility that is involved in these things? It's surprising that there are significant organisations at all in*

[292] Interviewee Tamás Szüts, 28.01.2023, Budapest, Hungary
[293] Interviewee Judit Szikra, 12.02.2023, Budapest, Hungary
[294] Interviewee Anikó Bernát, 18.01.2023, Budapest, Hungary
[295] Interviewee Zsuzsanna Zsohár, 29.01.2023, Budapest, Hungary
[296] Migration Aid (2023) Our history. [Online]. [Accessed on 23.04.2023]. Available from: https://migaid.org/en/our-history/

Eastern Europe when you see that. Compared to the Swedish civil society sector, where there are no such requirements at all, that's a huge difference in the amount of bureaucracy.' [297]

Sara Svensson, an associate professor in political science at Halmstad University

5.2 Strong leadership

Another aspect whose significance was repeatedly mentioned by interviewees was the (non)presence of clear and persistent leadership, striving to preserve the group's cohesion and activity impetus. Based on my findings, MA is the only GRI that succeeded in sustaining a strong leadership figure through the years. At the beginning Migration Aid had practically no official leader. However, according to the interviewees who were familiar with MA's activities during 2015, Ms. Zsohár was the most publicly recognizable figure from the group and was regarded as a de facto leader until she decided to leave the group in January of 2016. At that time, she passed her role onto András Sievert – an arguably controversial figure as reported by interviewees, who was not part of MA during the peak of their migrant relief activities, but joined later, as noted by Ms. Zsohár. He remains the official leader of the NGO until today:

'Making Andras my successor was my mistake. He fooled me. I was looking for the next spokesperson for 4 months. And people said, yeah, I can do it on Monday, Tuesday, and maybe Fridays. And I said no, it's. 24/7: You have to do it because there is a brand behind it. There is credibility behind it, which I built by answering the phone for 6 months. Each day, at each time in each language I could speak. And he was the only one willing to take it.'

Zsuzsanna Zsohár, a former spokesperson of MA

'The willingness of Andras and his friends who wanted to keep Migration Aid alive is one of the reasons why this is the only grassroots which survived from the 2015 voluntary movement. But this Migration Aid is not the Migration Aid it was before. After Andras came, he changed all the rules, we didn't like the way where MA went after September of 2015.'

Judit Szikra, an independent volunteer and member of different solidarity groups

[297] Interviewee Sara Svensson, 26.01.2023, Budapest, Hungary

Tamás Szüts and Anikó Bernát both agreed on the opinion that the new leader of Migration Aid is a 'strange' figure, however, his dedication to keeping the group running regardless of the circumstances proved crucial for its survival.

Ms. László from SEM acknowledged that in her former position as leader, stopping to invest enough time and effort into the group's dynamics proved detrimental to its future – eventually, in the autumn of 2018 the GRI stopped operating:

> *'The number one reason why Let's help refugees disintegrated was that me and the other leader – Szilard, became less pushy in trying to organise things and dedicated less of our efforts. Szilard and I were busy with our private lives. Without us constantly putting in so much time and effort, the group eventually died down.'*
>
> *Luca László, former Vice president of SEM*

Participant A.N. recalled the moment when the members of SEM gathered in Budapest to discuss their future as a group after the migrants stopped coming to Hungary:

> '*We had this group meeting of the core members to discuss what's next. What's our direction? What's our identity? Szilard, who was one of the key decision-makers and whose opinion was very important, wasn't there. Probably he was also already burned out or tried to step away. Or maybe he was already thinking about his political career, because then he stepped into it.'*
>
> *A.N., a former volunteer for SEM*

Interviewees who took the roles of either volunteers or leaders shared that on a lot of occasions, they interacted with the other grassroots initiatives and were informed about what was going on in the other groups. For instance, A.N. was baffled by the new leadership choice of Migration Aid:

> *'Their leadership was very aggressive. Andras Sievert, who became the leader of Migration Aid after the refugee flow in Hungary stopped, is still in position. For me personally, he was very shady. I don't understand how he's still the leader of MA and he's still in a position to ask for donations.'*
>
> *A.N., a former volunteer for SEM*

The former group members of MigSzol Szeged did not bring up leadership issues exclusively as something which provoked intergroup discussions and affected the post-2015 evolution of the GRI. Both Mr. Kékesi and Mr. Szüts rather focused on the fact that most of the members step-by-step decided to leave the group, hence leadership discussions were naturally uncalled-for.

5.3 Money issues

Most of the grassroots faced two main problems regarding money. Firstly, if to begin collecting money in general since all of the initiatives started operating without receiving cash as donations in order to avoid conflicts of interest. Secondly, if the groups agree to take money, how to properly manage it and ensure no one takes advantage of it.

The approaches of the grassroots varied. As reported by Mr. Kékesi, since the inception of MigSzol Szeged, the founding circle was hardly determined to never ask for money and manage material in-kind donations only – a principle which they abided by until the group stopped operating in November of 2017. MigSzol was the only group out of the 3 which adopted this work ethic during the entirety of their activities.

Interviewee A.N. shared how the initial 'no cash donations' policy of Let's Help Refugees Together was the impetus that persuaded them to volunteer for SEM:

> *'I felt much better with Let's help refugees - their approach to helping, their clear idea of how to help. The money issue was very important for me - that I felt secure there is no one cheating and no one stealing from those huge amounts of donations we received. I liked the concept that we give food, we cook. We don't ask for money; we ask for ingredients and that's all. This was the concept at the beginning which was much safer from the perspective of my identity.'*
>
> *A.N., a former volunteer for SEM*

Nevertheless, things in SEM changed after the migrants stopped transiting through Hungary. Part of the group decided to follow them along their new routes, an activity that required going abroad and therefore money to cover expenses such as gas, plane tickets, and accommodation. In the view of A.N., this affected the group's reputation and dynamics in a negative way:

'*After a while money was involved in SEM because moving to Slovenia, Croatia or Greece requires money. And I think that ruined the relations, the self-identity of people involved in Let's help because we were very proud that we do something in a different way - we don't touch money. Not collecting money was the image that made a lot of people come to us.'*

A.N., a former volunteer for SEM

The former Vice president of SEM – Ms. László explained that involving money was a necessary move to sustain the group's operations after 2015:

'If you have food you need to store it. If you have a place you need to pay rent. We had a lot of expenses that we couldn't cover from the material donations we were receiving, and we needed money - it was impossible to work without it. In 2018, we had some posts [on social media] where we would try to ask for money because at that time, we had a legal organisation with an organisational bank account, but it wasn't really happening anymore.'

Luca László, former Vice president of SEM

As SEM, at the beginning MA had a no-cash policy as well – according to Ms. Zsohár, the group was receiving tons of material donations only, which made Migration Aid a humanitarian 'wonder', whose authenticity was unmatchable. However, this approach was abandoned around November of 2015, when core members of the group began collecting money – something she did not agree with.

Heni Szikszai – one of the former leaders of Migration Aid Debrecen* (the name of the group has been changed to TAMI – Tarnabod and us, in Hungarian - Tarnabod és mi), shared that in the Budapest branch, tensions arise within the group regarding the way money donations are handled, provoking the departure of volunteers. [298] Ultimately, according to testimonies the issue of money pushed a lot of people to leave Migration Aid – this was the case for Ms. Szikra and her friends as well, who 'didn't want to be part of the group' anymore after it began accepting large sums of money.

[298] Interviewee Heni Szikszai, 11.02.2023, Budapest, Hungary

5.4 Relationship with the other grassroots & the government

As outlined in the literature review, the 'contacts with external stakeholders' factor is central to enhancing GRIs' visibility, networking, and funding opportunities. During my fieldwork, two major aspects concerning the grassroots' connection to outside entities were frequently reported: the 'toxic' relationship between the groups in Budapest and Migration Aid's supposed link to the Hungarian government.

Ms. László from SEM recalled that members from their GRI gossiped about the activities of Migration Aid and reciprocally - people from MA gossiped about them. Moreover, SEM didn't agree with the way in which Migration Aid was operating, and vice versa, as evidenced by the different testimonies:

> *'We had some disagreements with MA about the way they were conducting things. They were accepting money from quite early on. It was a bit of a rivalry because we felt that they are not doing things in the most inclusive way. We heard that they have distributed food and it was denied for the homeless people.'*
>
> *Luca László, former Vice president of SEM*

Participant A.N. explained that during their time as a volunteer for SEM, they didn't engage much with MA because SEM was 'against them'. Cooperation between the two Budapest-based volunteer organisations was limited, and feelings of toxic rivalry and jealousy were heavily present:

> *'The competition, craziness and the dark side of Hungarian culture. It was very disappointing […] In this humanitarian act, between those who were helping there was a clear competition and not a nice competition. We didn't work together or trust each other. It was a toxic race who is going to find the refugees first, who is going to be the hero. Migration Aid isolated themselves from the others and was asking for money - they wanted to be the best among the heroes.'*
>
> *A.N., a former volunteer for SEM*

Ms. Zsohár from Migration Aid has a different recollection of how things happened – according to her, SEM were the ones taking money and not providing migrant help adequately:

> *'I was yelling at them [SEM] a lot of times because they were taking money and they were cooking which was forbidden and a risk for us to be broken down, to be shut down.'*
>
> *Zsuzsanna Zsohár, a former spokesperson of MA*

Interviewee T.S. – an economist and public policy analyst at a university in the UK, who completed comparative research on the Hungarian and the Czech third sectors, concluded that while the Czech civil society was much better organised and way more successful in lobbying the government, the Hungarian one was far from reaching such goals:

> *'In the Hungarian civil society everybody hates everyone, and they don't really get along and they can't present any kind of joint up approach.'* [299]
>
> *T.S. an economist and public policy analyst*

The only GRI which didn't report having issues with the other grassroots was MigSzol Szeged. Mr. Kékesi explained that their group regularly exchanged 'experiences and donations' with the other two, via meetings organised either in-person or online. Heni Szikszai from the former MA Debrecen group also shared that they had a good relationships with the fellow migrant-helping initiatives, 'assisting each other' and swapping donations. A hypothetical explanation why the case of the Budapest-based groups was the opposite is that the location mattered greatly – Budapest saw the biggest inflow of migrants and humanitarian citizen aid response respectively, leading to the creation of several GRIs, which 'competed' against each other. In the smaller cities like Szeged and Debrecen, there was only one main volunteer initiative that volunteers joined, therefore they did not have any 'competitors'.

In regards to Migration Aid's alleged connections to the Hungarian government, a number of interviewees supported the opinion that after the leadership was changed, MA became involved with the state. Ms. Zsohár elaborated that she was first approached by the Hungarian constitution protecting agency (Alkotmányvédelmi Hivatal) in September 2015 when she was still the group's spokesperson. After she left and the new leader took onto her role, however, it is her personal belief that the organisation became financially involved with the government:

> *'They [Alkotmányvédelmi Hivatal] tried to bribe me and get information about my people [the MA members]. I didn't give them anything. It goes by envelopes. It's cash. After I left Migration Aid, they [the government] paid money to them [the members] to work. […] They bought the whole Organisation, this brand […] the best organisation working for refugees and working for humanity.'*
>
> *Zsuzsanna Zsohár, a former spokesperson of MA*

[299] Interviewee T.S., 09.02.2023, Budapest, Hungary

According to Ms. Szikra, Migration Aid has received money from the state to finance some of its most recent projects concerning the refugees fleeing Ukraine, while Ms. Bernát from TARKI shared that around 2017, Migration Aid was the sole organisation which was permitted to access the transit zones along the Southern border – something which she considers 'strange':

> '*Migration Aid was able to negotiate with the state that a couple of times a week they go to the transit zones. It's unclear what was their activity there - this is very strange because before MA was a clear opponent of the state and now for 'the good purpose' they say, they became a partner of the state.'*
>
> *Anikó Bernát, TARKI Social Research Institute*

András Kováts, the director of Menedék – Hungarian Association for Migrants – one of the most prominent civil society organisations in Hungary working in the areas of migrant integration and social development, described the relationship between MA and the government as 'awkward':

> *'They [MA] were the last ones who were kicked out of the transit facilities once the government started to tighten up, and they were the first and only ones who were let into the transit facility during the present crisis [The war in Ukraine]. So apparently they [MA] have a very good relationship with the government. It's a very awkward relationship […] sometimes there are conflicts with the government, but the conflicts never escalate to the level that they are labelled as the worst ones and they can still operate.'* [300]
>
> *András Kováts, director of Menedék - Hungarian Association for Migrants*

5.5 Outflow of workforce and donations

The next five categories emerged as a direct consequence of the sudden disappearance of migrants in Hungary after the borders were closed. The groups faced a number of problems, including many volunteers leaving, donations plummeting, issues with figuring out the group's future purpose and goals, internal disputes, and failed group reorganisation efforts.

Firstly, apart from Migration aid, the other GRIs experienced massive outflows of volunteers. Ms. László from SEM recalled that regardless of the long-awaited official

[300] Interviewee András Kováts, 13.01.2023, Budapest, Hungary

registration of the group, finding donors afterwards was extremely challenging. In her view, this was the other main reason why the group eventually collapsed. Moreover, she witnessed the enthusiasm of the volunteers waning – those who wanted to continue helping migrants had to go abroad, a circumstance which pushed many people to leave. Participant A.N. confirmed that after the migrants vanished a procedure of 'losing volunteers and support' followed in SEM straight afterwards, which heavily deteriorated the group's dynamics.

In MigSzol Szeged, the situation regarding volunteers was similar. Mr. Szüts reported that most of the people went back to their 'normal' lives after the migration flow ceased, quitting the group. Mr. Kékesi elaborated:

> '*There were three or four people, including me, who were there from the very first moment and we stayed until the end of the story. We were really feeling sorry in October, November [2015] when we saw that the volunteers are disappearing. By 2017 most of the volunteers went away, doing something else somewhere else.'*
>
> *Mark Kékesi, founder, and leader of MigSzol Szeged*

The participants from MigSzol noted that the group accumulated an 'incredible amount' of donations, which they stored in a school hall, provided by the local government at the time run by the opposition. After the borders closed, the group announced that they didn't need any more donations and continued to distribute them until they ran out of supplies in 2017.

The case of Migration Aid differed – many people left, but it was the group with the greatest number of volunteers, so a lot of them remained active after migrants stopped coming to Hungary. As Ms. Zsohár elaborated, people didn't leave MA in masses, because they believed they could 'change the world' after the more than a successful campaign in the summer. Ms. Szikra confirmed that although many people left the group, including her and her friends who didn't identify with the new course of MA after the leadership changed, part of the group remained committed regardless. Ildikó Zakariás - a sociologist and a researcher in the Centre for Social Sciences at the Budapest Institute for Minority Studies also reckons that the size of the volunteer body was fundamental to Migration Aid's survival:

> *'I think they survived because of the sheer number of activists they had - it was so strong and by far the biggest of all grassroots initiatives.'* [301]
>
> *Ildikó Zakariás, Budapest Institute for Minority Studies*

[301] Interviewee Ildikó Zakariás, 11.02.2023, Budapest, Hungary

5.6 Group reorganisation

After the migrants were no longer present, all GRIs tried to rechannel their efforts to help the local poor or other vulnerable groups in their area, in an effort to keep the group running. However, most of these endeavours failed in the long run. As Studer and Von Schnurbein (2012) emphasize, 'volunteering is an 'emotional and value-based activity' [302], while an alternation in the group's mission can heavily impact the degree of identification volunteers feel towards the end goal. [303]

Ms. László explained that even though SEM's position was that they would help anyone in need, once the migrants were gone, people were 'suddenly not so interested in helping anymore':

> *'After 2015 we thought OK, it's never going to be the same again, but we can still be active. In 2016 and 2017 we were cooking hot meals and distributing sleeping bags for the homeless people in Budapest, but in 2018 the donations were going down and we couldn't make a difference anymore […] It's really sad the group died. I think it really shows how different it was for people to help asylum seekers compared to homeless people.'*
>
> *Luca László, former Vice president of SEM*

Interviewee A.N. vividly remembered the time when SEM began looking for alternative target groups to assist, shortly after the migrants vanished from the humanitarian scene in Hungary. SEM volunteers felt that they have jointly built an extraordinary 'engine' with a lot of human and material resources, which would go to 'waste' if not reoriented towards a similar cause. Re-figuring the group's identity involved debates about the new 'style of helping' - whether they had to help the Roma or homeless people. However, the results were 'disappointing':

> *'While we were spending huge amounts of donations for refugees, poor Hungarian people and the homeless were watching us and they thought, OK, I have never seen this massive help when I was asking for it. […] Some volunteers were refusing to give a plate of soup to the homeless, claiming the food was only for the refugees. […] There were conflicts inside the group – some wanted to support the Roma, others the homeless, others wanted to follow the refugees and it was*

[302] Studer, S. & Von Schnurbein, G. (2012) Organisational Factors Affecting Volunteers: A Literature Review on Volunteer Coordination, International Society for Third-Sector Research and The John's Hopkins University 2012
[303] Ibid.

visible that it became personal. It was not about being professional and finding the right way to continue, it became a power issue. What social issue will get the infrastructure and the resources that Let's help refugees established. After the borders were closed, the design of the way we helped collapsed, became just empty […] something which is not necessary anymore.'

A.N., a former volunteer for SEM

Researchers observing the 2015 'Humanitarian miracle' also highlighted that while migrants were oversupplied with donations, the Hungarian indigenous poor such as the homeless or the Roma were regularly 'ignored' by some of the volunteers, who were refusing to provide them with either food or clothes because the provisions were 'reserved' for the migrants. [304] According to scholars, this denial to assist other vulnerable groups in Hungary exemplifies profound divisions in the domestic civic sector [305], mirroring some of the 'extreme' polarizations currently present in Hungary. [306] These polarizations can successfully be identified as cleavages, built upon the perceptions of the 'deservingness' and worthiness of some members of the public and the 'undeservingness' of others. [307]

Ms. Zsohár shared that after Hungary closed the borders, she voiced her opinion that Migration Aid must be disbanded or reorganized, since without the migrants, existing within the current configuration was pointless. However, a lot of her fellow members didn't agree with her and continued following the migrants to other countries in Europe, such as Greece, a move strongly supported by the soon-appointed new leader.

On the other side, as observed by Ms. Bernát, a number of subgroups separated themselves from the central Migration Aid group, alienated from the new leadership and its insistence to follow the old course of the organisation. For instance, the largest fraction of former MA members established the 'Keleti group', which desired to be completely independent from the 'big' MA:

'They [the Keleti group] were among the first ones who said ok, we are turning towards the Hungarian vulnerable and poor. Unfortunately, they didn't succeed – it was probably because they remained just a few dedicated people and because this is a very hard job. All the responsibility you're taking for a refugee transiting for a few days is giving them basic food, some clothes,and information on how to go onwards - it's a much smaller responsibility or a project, than helping the

[304] Kallius, A., Monterescu, D. & Rajaram, P. (2016) Immobilizing mobility: Border ethnography, illiberal democracy, and the politics of the "refugee crisis" in Hungary, American ethnologist, Vol. 43
[305] Ibid.
[306] The Civil Society Sustainability Index (2021) Country Reports: Hungary
[307] Kallius, A., Monterescu, D. & Rajaram, P. (2016) Immobilizing mobility: Border ethnography, illiberal democracy, and the politics of the "refugee crisis" in Hungary, American ethnologist, Vol. 43

Roma, homeless people or elderly in poverty who have been theoretically helped by state's social policy and are still poor, and still homeless.'

Anikó Bernát, TARKI Social Research Institute

Ms. Szikszai explained how the members of the former Migration Aid Debrecen group included her as a leader refused to abandon the initiative and collectively decided to shift their efforts into helping a village located north of Debrecen – Tarnabod, where a large community of impoverished Hungarian Roma lives. Ms. Szikszai and the other volunteers 'made their own non-governmental association' and registered as an NGO called 'TAMI'. They continue organising charity events for Roma and other local vulnerable groups, including the homeless, until today.

After the border closures, the MigSzol group decided to distribute the remaining donations to migrants around Hungary who were placed in camps, and to the local needy, mainly homeless people. The GRI also took part in organising cooking sessions with migrants across different schools in the Szeged area. According to Mr. Kékesi the group never closed 'officially', but they stopped operating in November of 2017 when all the accumulated donations were given out:

'We created something very popular, even among people who didn't like immigrants. They realised that we are helping everybody […] These forces or synergies that we gathered, and these newly established networks of volunteers should be applied for different goals, and that didn't work out.'

Mark Kékesi, founder, and leader of MigSzol Szeged

Mr. Tamás Szüts, recalled that the volunteers for MigSzol were discussing possibilities of what to do next, but eventually, they gave up on the idea to carry on:

'After [the borders were closed] we were just trying to look ahead a little bit, how we can continue this movement. But almost every member decided to stop volunteering.'

Tamás Szüts, a former volunteer for MigSzol Szeged and Migration Aid Budapest

5.7 Internal conflicts & personal agenda pushing

Confrontations between members of the citizen aid initiatives were common – mainly revolving around the organisation's future goals, leadership positions, and donation management. Interviewees from SEM and Migration Aid reported the highest intensity of interpersonal disagreements:

> *'There were internal conflicts because we were never a real organisation until 2017. But then in 2071 it was dying. […] It was always this uncertainty - who is authorised to make decisions? How are we going forward? Who are we helping? It was very difficult to find refugee camps. We focused a lot on homeless people, but it wasn't the same. We couldn't find the same amount of support. Ultimately, people had to return to their normal lives.'*
>
> *Luca László, former Vice president of SEM*

Ms. László also shared that some of the volunteers got into romantic relationships with one another, which caused further disputes within the group, negatively impacting the day-to-day operations of SEM.

Interviewee A.N. thought that there was a complete lack of control over the organisations' resources – not only in SEM but also in the other grassroots:

> *'It was a habit that volunteers [in SEM] were finding support for themselves from the donations. It was a norm. […] But in other groups, it was massive stealing of goods. I trust the sources from where I heard that people were selling goods online. And it's clear that the amount of money, goods, and infrastructure that arrived at the hands of these groups it's power and power […] It's changing people and personalities.'*
>
> *A.N., a former volunteer for SEM*

Participant A.N. also touched upon how in their view assisting migrants 'in a terrible condition' made volunteers experience power, which afterwards resulted in competition for intergroup positions – something with heavily eroded SEM's cohesion. Eventually, after the migrants were no longer present and the group had to decide how to go forward, people were more concerned about their own careers and individual goals, rather than the group's collective aspirations:

'When you help refugees you feel wow, I'm a Superman! And this creates power and addiction - you're addicted to that feeling, something which wasn't managed at all. We experienced massive power that we are saving lives. This was an engine, but it had a bad impact - we thought much more about ourselves, and it entered the core team of Let's help together. […] These little personal agendas appeared. Am I the leader? Am I the one who's shaping the direction? People started to fill up these gaps by their wishes and by their ambitions.'

A.N., a former volunteer for SEM

Judit Szikra reckons that the decisions Migration Aid took regarding their future direction, coupled with the way the organisation handled resources including money provoked the departure of many volunteers, including hers. For instance, she witnessed how people close to the new leader were treated with privilege while volunteers' wishes were rather neglected:

'Andras [the new leader] wanted to decide on his own about everything. He didn't give us access to the warehouse where we were collecting [donations] for months. We knew that the food would go wrong. Even the clothes will go wrong. […] He spent a lot of money within his own family – he hired his son as an official translator from English, but we all knew that he knew only German, not English.'

Judit Szikra, an independent volunteer and member of different solidarity groups

Tamás Szüts, who also volunteered for Migration Aid after he left MigSzol Szeged, has similar observations about the course of the new leadership, calling MA a 'one man-made organisation':

'We [the volunteers] weren't able to discuss what to do together – he [Andras] was the only one who made orders or said what we had to do. We weren't able to speak together or [to have a say in] what to do with the donations. It was like one man-made the organisation.'

Tamás Szüts, a former volunteer for MigSzol Szeged and Migration Aid Budapest

Participants observing the current helping activities of Migration Aid surrounding the refugees coming from Ukraine to Hungary voiced their concerns regarding the unfair treatment of Roma refugees. According to the group's official webpage, Migration Aid is currently

operating the biggest refugee shelter for Ukrainians in Hungary, located in Budapest. [308] However, interviewees reported that a lot of people have left the organisation recently, opposing the directions given by the leader. Anikó Bernát from TARKI - a volunteer for MA assisting in the Ukrainian crisis, elaborated:

> *'There was a rule from the very beginning of the operation of this shelter that only women and children up to 12 years old can be sent there, so intimacy cannot be breached. But the other problem is that there was a rule which was not explicit, but a very vitally known and clear rule that Roma should not be sent there. Neither Ukrainian nor Hungarian Roma refugees. I know that these beliefs about the Roma are sometimes supported by evidence, but generalizing it, I think it's unacceptable.'*
>
> *Anikó Bernát, TARKI Social Research Institute*

Ms. Zsohár stated that she has seen text messages sent by the current leader, instructing volunteers from the shelter to bar refugees from certain ethnic backgrounds from being provided accommodation:

> *'In this shelter, they don't let any Roma in. They don't let any Muslims in, they don't let anyone in who is not blonde and blue-eyed. […] I have screenshots from some group chats where he [Andras] writes: 'We don't want any people who are dark colored in the facility'. […] I know some people who were working in the shelter at the beginning. They had conflicts with Andras.'*
>
> *Zsuzsanna Zsohár, a former spokesperson of MA*

These 'rules' sparked immense disagreements between the leadership of MA and volunteers managing the refugee shelter began leaving:

> *'The leaders of Migration Aid kicked out the leaders of the shelter, but most of the activists [volunteers] followed them [the leaders of the shelter] because they said that they don't trust the leaders of Migration Aid. Together they formed a new group called 'Hi Volunteer' to help the Ukrainian refugees, but not as part of Migration Aid.'*
>
> *Anikó Bernát, TARKI Social Research Institute*

[308] Migration Aid (2023) Madridi Street refugee shelter. [Online]. [Accessed on 18.07.2023]. Available from: https://migaid.org/en/madridi/

Heni Szikszai also commented on the ongoing conflict-ridden situation in Migration Aid which caused people to look for alternative platforms to volunteer in:

> *'There was a fight in MA Budapest about money, because Andras [the leader] collected it, but some of the volunteers didn't trust him. So now the people exchanged in this group - new people came. There was a young guy - Marcy, I was with him in Ukraine. He was so disappointed, and he left Migration Aid because he wasn't sure the huge amounts of money that was raised were used in the right way'.*
>
> *Heni Szikszai, former leader of Migration Aid Debrecen and current leader of TAMI*

5.8 The 'crisis' factor & personal responsibility

This category refers to the 'sense of urgency' success factor, which drives people to undertake collective action and search for solutions regarding issues considered important for the members of a grassroots initiative. As underlined in Chapter 2, in 2015 thousands of Hungarians, many of whom were motivated by outrage, provided support to the migrants.[309] However, when migrants stopped entering Hungary and the GRIs turned to helping the local needy, the helping impetus and 'outrage' were lost.

Interviewee A.N. clarified that it's not only more difficult to mobilise resources for other vulnerable groups in Hungary but that on a personal level, volunteers in SEM believed they couldn't influence the lives of the local needy for the better, resulting in a lack of feelings of self-efficacy and positive outcome expectations. On the other side, working for migrants made GRI members feel like 'heroes', which gave them a great sense of empowerment:

> *'It was much easier to help refugees. You give food, play for 20 minutes with a beautiful kid, then you put them on the train, say goodbye, smile at each other, and keep in touch on Facebook. You feel successful helping them, that you can solve problems […] When you do this with homeless people and Roma it feels like an endless story, you don't make any impact, you don't change people's life. It's a constant struggle. […] Working with homeless people on the street for many of us was not something that we wanted to do, and we didn't take enough from them to keep us working. When*

[309] TÁRKI Social Research Institute (2016) The Social Aspects of the 2015 Migration crisis in Hungary

we were helping refugees in June, July we had this feeling that we had an impact on people's lives. And that feeling was lost when the group shifted towards helping locals.'

A.N., a former volunteer for SEM

As already suggested by Ms. Bernát, the fact that the Roma and the homeless in Hungary are recipients of different governmental programmes but with questionable results might have impacted how other Hungarians perceive the urgency of the issue. András Kováts – the director of Menedék, points out that in his view the failed attempt of the humanitarian initiatives to rechannel their efforts towards the Hungarian needy is not surprising. According to him one of the reasons behind the diminished feelings of solidarity towards the impoverished locals is the absence of personal responsibility - a feeling which was overflowing during the Migration crisis of 2015 - a very publicized event, which sparked curiosity among the population and made people interested:

'This expectation that these energies could just be channelled from one target group to another one was absolutely mistaken. It was a different type of drive. The willingness to help refugees in 2015 and even 2016 was very mediatised, it was a hype. There was a huge social pressure on you to do something, to take sides. […] Refugees were coming from far away - projecting the idea of the real, deserving, needy, and poor refugee was just so easy. It's much more difficult to project these towards a local community that you live every day with, like homeless people or Roma people, drug users, or the poor. I think people much more easily say that these people just don't deserve […] why should I help them? It's not my business, It's the state's business.'

András Kováts, director of Menedék - Hungarian Association for Migrants

The feeling of self-efficacy was much more fervent when volunteers helped migrants, who were only transiting through Hungary – not willing to settle down in the country or require long-term integration assistance. Mr. Kováts emphasized that the temporary nature of the crisis multiplied the solidarity efforts, which were much more fruitful in terms of a cost-benefit perspective:

'Nobody wanted to stay in Hungary, that was definitely a factor. You give out the doll [to a refugee child] and you get a smile in return. Happy people. Business done. Imagine the homeless - you go there with a bottle of water. You give the bottle of water. The next day, the homeless guy is still there […] so another bottle of water and then it goes on and on and on.'

András Kováts, director of Menedék - Hungarian Association for Migrants

Ms. László from SEM and Ms. Bernát from TARKI also underlined the significance of the omnipresent crisis as an element that heavily stimulated the sudden awakening of the Hungarian civil society:

> *'Whenever there is a catastrophe, a crisis, more and more people are interested to help. There were also a lot of people who joined us because it was trendy to help us. We received a lot of media attention, so there were a lot of people who wanted to be on TV - they were interested in becoming famous.'*
>
> *Luca László, former Vice president of SEM*

> *'People [in Hungary] think that the local poor in ordinary non-crisis times are the responsability of the state. […] I might give them from time to time a bag of shopping but it is a long-term mission and when you see no progress […] It's psychologically tricky. When helping in an extraordinary situation there is more adrenaline because of the extraordinary circumstances.[…] It is natural people won't jump into solving something so difficult which is not solved by ages and not solved by the big players, state and charities who have the money, the infrastructure. The refugee crisis was so visible […] The crisis is what makes them mobilise. […] Solidarity is on the rise in Hungary in times of crisis, but we do not know what is beyond that.'*
>
> *Anikó Bernát, TARKI Social Research Institute*

Supporting the opinion of Ms. Bernát, the director of Menedék agreed that from his perspective as a sociologist working with migrants and refugees in Hungary, the civil society in the country does not function properly. Mr. Kováts illustrated his argument with the examples of the two most recent voluntary movements in Hungary – the one of 2015 and the still ongoing one of 2022/23, when people once more mobilized in masses to assist the Ukrainian refugees. However, during the time between those two events, a strong civil society mobilisation did not occur, leading professionals to conclude that the presence of an external impetus is a vital factor, which pushes the Hungarian civil society to suddenly 'boom':

> *'I agree with the notion proposed by many researchers that the civil society in Hungary is weak because this is not a normal way of operation. Things happen but they are triggered by external circumstances, and this is not a normal way of life as a society. I think that type of apathy and reluctance it's very typical for the civil societies of all East European countries.'*
>
> *András Kováts, director of Menedék – Hungarian association for Migrants*

This observation is important since it perfectly illustrates what happened to Migration Aid in the period between 2015 and 2023. Despite the fact that technically it's the only 2015 GRI that 'survived', interviewees share the common opinion that before the war in Ukraine, they rarely stumbled across any news about the activities of Migration Aid. Mr. Kováts stated that he hadn't heard about them 'for years' until February 2022, when they 'suddenly reappeared' on the scene.

Ms. Bernát reported the very same observation, sharing that Migration Aid has been 'revived from scratch' during the present crisis, prior to which they didn't represent a real association in terms of regular activity, and were 'in a sleeping mode'. Heni Szikszai from the former Debrecen branch noted on the 'sleeping' MA Budapest as well, only to be 'refreshed' by the Ukrainian crisis.

5.9 Mental health

Keri (2015) notes that researching the impact of the 2015 Migration crisis on mental health is 'essential' to contemplate its 'nature'. [310] This is the first category which appeared as a separate factor during the coding process, influencing the evolution of GRIs in humanitarian work in particular, differentiating from and complementing the initial factors outlined in the theoretical framework. The 'mental health' factor will encompass two major pillars that deeply affected the psychosocial wellness of volunteers according to the testimonies– consequently, many people left their grassroots groups.

Firstly, the fact that volunteers (many of whom didn't have any experience volunteering[311]) assisted in a humanitarian emergency made them witness and co-live the tragic circumstances surrounding some of the migrants, including listening to their personal stories of escaping war and persecution, losing family members, or helping thousands of children and mothers in poor health condition. Secondly, many volunteers spent a lot of sleepless nights on the field, provoking mental and physical collapses due to over-exhaustion and stress. During the most intense months of 2015, some volunteers revealed that they were spending between 10 and 20 hours per day on the field – the subsequent lack of proper rest brought many of them on the verge of complete breakdown. [312] The mere amount of time volunteers were away from

[310] Keri, S. (2015) Suffering Has No Race or Nation: The Psychological Impact of the Refugee Crisis in Hungary and the Occurrence of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Soc. Sci. 2015, 4, 1079–1086
[311] TÁRKI Social Research Institute (2016) The Social Aspects of the 2015 Migration crisis in Hungary
[312] Ibid.

their homes and loved ones caused issues within their families while their personal lives were also exposed in the media.

Beginning with participant A.N., who observed a number of their fellow volunteers from Let's Help Refugees Together (SEM) suffer from severe emotional anxiety, besides having access to psychologists who organized stress relief group sessions:

> '*What we were doing traumatised many people from our group. I've seen many colleagues' nerves, break down and cry and they never could imagine this would happen in Hungary.'*
>
> *A.N., a former volunteer for SEM*

When discussing the impact of volunteering on one's personal life, A.N. shared that it was one of the main rationales behind their decision to quit the group:

> '*At one point, my partner made it clear that if I continue this way, they will move away from our home. I was not spending time at home. I brought refugees to our home. I wasn't available. […] I put my family at risk. At the time, I worked in the food industry. I started to work at 6:00 and finished at 16:00. And then I went to the train station. Then I became the local hero. Then I went home for a little bit, but then someone called me, and I told my spouse sorry I had to rush to the hospital because I'm the only one who can fix this. This was one reason why what I was doing wasn't sustainable in the long term. Also, I wasn't happy in my workplace [SEM]. I just didn't know what to do when refugees moved. There was an emptiness.'*
>
> *A.N., a former volunteer for SEM*

Ms. László from Let's Help Refugees Together commented that during her experience assisting migrants in 2015, Syrian women were giving birth 'on the pavement' in Budapest, while Mark Kékesi from MigSzol Szeged shared that even though volunteers in his group including him as a leader were trying not to get invested in the personal stories of the migrants, in certain cases it was 'impossible'. Similar to the people from SEM, the ones in Szeged saw many 'sad stories' and all 'sorts of disgusting things going on'.

Ms. Zsohár from Migration Aid shared that her personal life was under severe scrutiny by the media, both in Hungary and abroad, something which severely affected her integrity by

putting her private relationships under the spotlight. Consequently, she decided to step back from MA to protect her family.

While researching the impact of the humanitarian emergency on volunteer's mental health, Anikó Bernát emphasised on another traumatic experience that some of the migrants went through – namely the fact that many of them were victims of exploitation and human trafficking, not only in Hungary but in other countries in Europe:

> *'A lot of volunteers didn't want to continue with this very demanding helping activity because many of them burned out. They have trauma tests because they have seen and heard a lot of very harsh things from refugees. There were a lot of things we are not really talking about, but they were part of the story - human trafficking, a lot of crime, exploitation of migrants and refugees. […] These kinds of stories were all over the Balkan route, Hungary was just a short section, but it was a section of it and the volunteers heard these things and at some point, they stopped their activity.'*
>
> *Anikó Bernát, TARKI Social Research Institute*

Heni Szikszai reckons that the 2015 events were a 'very sad story' but at the same time, they proved that a lot of 'good people' live in Hungary, although in her view 'racism' is something to which half of the Hungarian society subscribes. However, she refused to befriend any of the migrants she helped on social media, because creating closure with them was something she considered extremely tough emotionally. In a similar vein, Mr. Kékesi stated that regardless of the lamentable circumstances surrounding the Crisis, the voluntary movement demonstrated that Hungary is not a country 'of 10 million xenophobes.'

5.10 Legal barriers

The second factor which emerged separately and is connected specifically to the particular case of Hungary is the legal framework of the country, namely the laws which directly affect individuals and civil society initiatives working in the area of migrant help. Interviewees testified that certain legal amendments introduced to the Penal Code of Hungary after the 2015 'Humanitarian miracle' severely impacted not only the work of such citizen aid organisations but also the willingness of ordinary people to participate in them or any other kind of similar activity, because of fear of repercussions.

According to scholars, Fidesz's anti-CSO campaign (also famous as the 'Stop Soros' campaign) reached its apotheosis in 2017, when the Hungarian parliament passed a law that

obliged all NGOs in the country receiving more than € 24,000 of subsidies from abroad to register as 'foreign funded' organisations. [313] Researchers have drawn attention to the similarities between this legislation and Russia's 'foreign agent law' introduced in 2012, which has caused the shutdown of around 30 civil society organisations since then. [314] The meddling into CSO's financial affairs comes after Orbán declared NGOs 'one of the five dangers' [315] that Hungary faces. [316] In 2018, another set of bills was voted which made the act of aiding migrants criminal, targeting all people involved with migrant-relief acts, who according to the government 'promote illegal migration.' [317] In accordance with the text of the last legislation, anyone caught helping migrants in Hungary or disseminating information about migration can serve a sentence in prison [318], while any organisation which participates in 'propaganda activities that portray migration in a positive light' [319] is a subject of additional taxation of 25%.[320] Such kinds of regulations breach the legal frameworks of the European Union, the European Court of Human Rights, and the provisions of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees simultaneously. [321]

Ms. Bernát from TARKI explained that Orbán's governments began to legally re-shape the civil society sector in Hungary years before the 2015 Migration crisis, by cultivating a network of government-friendly CSOs, a move which shrank the operational space of all other NGOs. The voluntary wave in 2015 however, prompted an even tougher anti-civil society legal response:

> *'The new legislation was a direct answer to the migration helping activities during the summer of 2015 and a response to the grassroots organisations, which were understood as an oppositional political act. This was the reaction from the Hungarian government […] It started to criminalise people who are helping refugees because Hungary is not welcoming refugees and migrants. Helping refugees, especially providing them with shelter and money, became a crime. It was a legal act which entered into force.'*
>
> *Anikó Bernát, TARKI Social Research Institute*

[313] Demjen, J. E. (2021) Countering the Politics of Fear - Reframing Threat Narratives about Refugees in Hungary, RLI Working Paper No. 58
[314] Timmer, A. & Docka-Filipek, D. (2018) Enemies of the Nation: Understanding the Hungarian State's Relationship to Humanitarian NGOs, Journal of International and Global Studies: Vol. 9: No. 2, Article 3.
[315] Timmer, A. (2017) Responding to the Crisis: Humanitarian Aid to Refugees and Migrants in Hungary, Bulletin of the General Anthropology Division, Volume 24, No. 2
[316] Ibid.
[317] Demjen, J. E. (2021) Countering the Politics of Fear - Reframing Threat Narratives about Refugees in Hungary, RLI Working Paper No. 58
[318] Kallius, A. (2019) Solidarity in Transit, in 'Challenging the Political Across Borders: Migrants' and Solidarity Struggles', Budapest Center for Policy Studies, Central European University
[319] Ibid.
[320] Ibid.
[321] Stivas, D. (2021) The art of securitising. Orbán's handling of the European refugee crisis, Journal of Contemporary European Studies

Interviewee T.S. presented a similar observation to Ms. Bernát's regarding the development of government-tied CSOs:

> *'In Hungary, there are two parallel civil societies. One is co-opted by the government - after Orbán lost the elections in 2002, he very consciously started building up a grassroots movement behind Fidesz across the country. This is one of the reasons behind Fidesz's success […] If you want to do civic activism that the government views favourably [..] for example, if you want to go work at a faith-based NGOs like the Hungarian Baptist State [..] then your space hasn't shrunk at all. In fact, your space has significantly expanded. But if you think about NGOs representing the grassroots and helping people organise and express opposition […] they are the bad civil society that likes migrants, helps refugees and human rights, and are labelled as foreign agents.'*
>
> *T.S. an economist and public policy analyst*

Ms. Bernát specified that to her knowledge, no one has been punished under the new laws, but the mere existence of the legislation is enough to deter activists from assisting migrants or participating in CSOs working in the field, because of the imminent risk of being criminally prosecuted. András Kováts - in his capacity as a director of one of the largest civil society organisations in Hungary that specializes in migrant and refugee help, defined the Hungarian anti-CSO legislation as 'nasty'. Mr. Kováts shared that Menedék was listed as a 'foreign agent NGO' after which the pro-government media outlets labelled them as 'enemies of the nation'. Consequently, this profoundly affected their integrity and ability to secure firm donorship partners:

> *'We became much more suspicious [as an organisation]. That was one of the reasons why many of our partners stopped the operational contract with us - it was too risky for them to work with an NGO that is labelled as a foreign agent. That was difficult […] this very strong government attack on progressive, liberal human rights based civil society actors […] which affects only a limited number of civil society organisations. But it definitely had a very clear message that if you are critical towards the government, then you are considered a political actor, and you will be dealt with the same tools.'*
>
> *András Kováts, director of Menedék - Hungarian Association for Migrants*

Furthermore, Mr. Kováts holds the opinion that the legal amendments had a negative impact on individual participation as well - ordinary Hungarians became fearful to volunteer or work for the CSOs blacklisted by the government. Anikó Bakonyi - Director of the Refugee

programme in the Hungarian Helsinki Committee (HHC), elaborated on the most recent revisions of the anti-CSO legislation in Hungary and shares the experience of her NGO:

> '*What's been challenging is that the space in which we work is constantly shrinking. There is more pressure on civil society working with migration, so we must be very innovative and resilient to pursue the same type of work. […] Our names were printed in Hungary among other people, not just human rights defenders, but also people working in academia, that we are enemies of the nation serving foreign interests. We [the HHC] just won a lawsuit [against the state of Hungary] that we have the right to a good reputation, and you can't just name people 'enemies of the nation' and print their names in a weekly paper.'* [322]
>
> *Anikó Bakonyi, Director of the Refugee Programme, Hungarian Helsinki Committee*

Ms. Bakonyi noted that part of the current legal framework targets specifically the functionality of all CSOs in Hungary working in areas such as human rights (like the Helsinki Committee), migrant, refugee, or asylum-seeker assistance by threatening their employees with imprisonment. In particular, all employees or volunteers can serve up to 1 year in prison for participating in such organisations – something which she describes as having a 'chilling effect' on the sector. In more recent terms, Ms. Bakonyi reported that since May 2020 under the provisions of a new legal act, it's currently 'impossible' to seek asylum in Hungary.

Looking at a slightly different angle, Ms. Bakonyi pointed out that former staff members of the 'backlisted' civil society groups have a significantly lower chance to be later employed in government-run entities, like ministries or agencies, limiting their job opportunities. Prof. Sara Svensson also supports the opinion that Hungarians who join CSOs working with vulnerable groups are prone to be excluded from public sector vacancies. According to her, this practice further erodes the already trembling democracy in Hungary, since more people refuse to be associated with the 'blacklisted' CSOs out of fear. On the other hand, citizens can fearlessly engage with the government-sponsored third sector, without being intimidated with imprisonment or barred from the public job market.

Interviewee A.N. who continued their professional career in one of Hungary's best acclaimed humanitarian NGOs after leaving Let's Help Refugees Together, reported that their current NGO lost both human and financial capital due to the 'Stop Soros' laws:

[322] Interviewee Anikó Bakonyi, 19.01.2023, Budapest, Hungary

'You are losing donors. You're losing volunteers. Because they got scared. We have probably lost colleagues who didn't want to live with such pressure. This pressure is dressed up in a legal way and is functioning very well.'

A.N., a former volunteer for SEM

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The magnitude of the 2015 Crisis and the challenge it presented to all stakeholders, including national governments and agencies, international charities, the EU, and ordinary citizen organisations tends to be frequently underestimated – in reality, the events of 8 years ago exemplified the biggest migration crisis in the world since the one of the Second world war. [323] Given the gravity of the situation, many European states failed to respond fast and adequately enough, significantly expanding the room for grassroots initiatives to form and assist in the humanitarian emergency, filling the 'solidarity gap' in the public space. [324]

The significance of Chapter 1 lies in the illustration of the context in which Hungary welcomed the Migration wave – the overly-excessive and hostile anti-migrant rhetoric coming from the government, which successfully managed to infiltrate the perceptions of the public, most of which heavily followed the discriminatory narrative. On the other side of the spectrum stood as many as 294,000 humanitarian volunteers, motivated by outrage and altruism, constituting the two ambivalent Hungarian realities – the bigger one faithful to the government and the smaller one of the 'reborn' civil society. [325]

This thesis began with the aim to provide insights into the development of the three biggest grassroots humanitarian initiatives in Hungary after their relief efforts surrounding the 2015 Migration crisis were over – an overlooked topic in the literature, which the current research aspired to address. Encapsulating the 'Hungarian humanitarian miracle' solely within the boundaries of the 2015 timeframe cuts out the opportunity to glance beyond the 'long summer of migration' and answer the important research question of why some 'miracles' endured through time, while others did not. As Bernát (2019) states 'the impact of that few intensive months is much beyond its length'. [326]

All three of the grassroots organisations were performing some kind of aid activities for at least two more years after their initial inception – whether helping the local needy or following migrants outside Hungary. Mapping out in detail the exact momenta which proved detrimental to their future ambitions constitutes the main research aspect in the present thesis

[323] Coen, A. (2015) R2P, Global Governance, and the Syrian refugee crisis, The International Journal of Human Rights, 19:8, 1044-1058
[324] Interviewee Anikó Bernát, 18.01.2023, Budapest, Hungary
[325] Garbovan, L. (2015) Mobilities and Experiences of (Un)Welcoming Refugees in Hungary: Towards an End of Human Rights and Democracy?, Studi Emigrazione/Migration Studies, CENTRO STUDI EMIGRAZIONE – ROMA, LII, n. 199, 2015
[326] Bernát, A. (2019) Solidarity powered via social media: Migrant solidarity grassroots groups in Hungary. In: Travlou, P. and Ciolfi, L. (Eds.). Ethnographies of Collaborative Economies Conference Proceedings. University of Edinburgh

which successfully empirically tested the preliminary theoretical framework described in Chapter 3, but also localized and proposed additional analytical angles, tailored for citizen aid activities working in humanitarian aid.

As the interviewees' insights denote, Migration Aid, Let's Help Refugees Together and MigSzol Szeged faced similar challenges, which were explored in detail for each of the three organisations, promptly answering the research question posed in the introduction. However, only one of the three case studies – namely Migration Aid, managed to 'survive' and continue operation until today, regardless of the severity of the obstacles. Taking into account the distressing nature of the humanitarian emergency, as well as the national specifics of Hungary, such as the prevalent anti-migrant political and social atmosphere and the restrictive legal framework, the main findings of the empirical work can be summarised as the following:

The two factors which proved as having the biggest influence on the initiatives' survival (or failure) and were crucial for them to avoid termination were the number of volunteers at the organisation's disposal in terms of organisational resources and the strength and persistence of the leadership. After closely analyzing the empirical data, these are the two aspects that substantially distinguish Migration Aid from the other two grassroots initiatives – SEM and MigSzol Szeged, which didn't manage to sustain a lasting leadership figure(s), or a stable volunteer body post the peak of the 2015 events. As evidenced, the other 8 categories which emerged were present, although to a different degree, in at least one of the other two GRIs (sometimes in both), which answers the question of what the common obstacles they faced were, but not why only Migration Aid 'succeeded' in overcoming them.

It's essential to highlight that the two factors are heavily interconnected, as a number of testimonies signified. In particular, the less assertive leaders became to keep the group running, the more volunteers left the organisation. The analysis of the fieldwork clearly indicates that there is a positive correlation between having a dedicated leader and the grassroots' survival - the very same observation is valid for the size of the volunteer body. As explained in the Empirical findings chapter, although the 3 groups faced substantial outflow of volunteers after 2015, the one which had the biggest number of active volunteers survived (MA), simply because the ones who chose to stay compensated for the departure of some of the workforce. In the other two GRIs that had fewer members, the act of volunteers leaving was irrevocable - not only did it make their work nearly impossible, but interconnectedly, it also discouraged their respective leaders from fighting for the survival of the organisation. Leaving the contested nature of Migration Aid's leader aside and the group's alleged connections to the Hungarian government, his willingness to keep the group running at all costs

resulted in Migration Aid being the sole 'survivor' of the 3 GRIs, still functioning as of 2023. The dedication and persistence of the volunteers and leaders from the former Migration Aid Debrecen group and their new NGO – TAMI, also represent a grassroots success story, considering their ongoing activities in improving the life of different vulnerable groups in Hungary.

The theoretical framework proposed that a 'successful' GRI has the power to advocate for different social and behavioral standards and bring societal change. The findings of this research, however, point out ambivalent conclusions concerning this analytical aspect. First of all, considering Hungary's ongoing public and political discourse which is still highly infiltrated with 'xenophobic' and 'divisive and antagonistic overtones' [327] targeting groups such as migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers [328], organisations like Migration Aid can act as safe havens for those citizens who diverge from the overall anti-migrant atmosphere in the country and wish to join an already established and well-known structure with an arguably solid experience in the sector. Nevertheless, the reports from interviewees regarding the discriminatory practices of MA's management towards the Roma and Muslim refugees from Ukraine, unfortunately, fuel the very same narrative the NGO is trying to rewrite. Therefore, it would be of high relevance for future research into the topic to investigate for instance, whether the informal and amateurish inception phase of a grassroots group, as well as the inexperience of volunteers, can have any persisting negative impact on its operation in the future, regardless of its official NGO status.

[327] Council of Europe (2023) Hungary: police hate crime investigations are enhanced, but growing LGBTI stigmatisation and xenophobic political discourse raise concern. [Online]. [Accessed on 29.07.2023]. Available from: https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/-/hungary-police-hate-crime-investigations-are-enhanced-but-growing-lgbti-stigmatisation-and-xenophobic-political-discourse-raise-concern
[328] Ibid.

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APPENDIX:

A. List of Interviewees

	Name & Surname / Pseudonym	Description	Date & Place of interview
1	**András Kováts**	*Sociologist, Director of MENEDÉK — Hungarian Association for Migrants*	13. 01. 2023 Budapest, Hungary
5	**Anikó Bakonyi**	*Director, Refugee programme at the Hungarian Helsinki Committee*	19. 01. 2023 Budapest, Hungary
2	**Anikó Bernát**	*Researcher and sociologist at TARKI Social Research Institute, Budapest, and volunteer for Migration Aid Budapest*	18. 01. 2023 Budapest, Hungary
10	**Heni Szikszai**	*Former leader of Migration Aid Debrecen and current leader of TAMI –- Tarnabod és mi*	11.02.2023 Budapest, Hungary
8	**Ildikó Zakariás**	*Sociologist and a researcher in the Centre for Social Sciences at the Institute for Minority Studies, Budapest*	11. 02. 2023 Budapest, Hungary
11	**Judit Szikra**	*Independent volunteer and member of different solidarity groups. A former volunteer for Migration Aid*	12. 02. 2023 Budapest, Hungary
9	**Luca László**	*Former Vice president of SEM (Let's Help Refugees Together)*	05. 01. 2023 Budapest, Hungary
3	**Márk Kékesi**	*Founder and leader of Mig Szol Szeged; Sociologist and researcher at the University of Szeged*	21. 01. 2023 Budapest, Hungary

4	**Sara Svensson**	*Associate professor in political science at Halmstad University, Sweden, and a Research Affiliate at the Center for Policy Studies at the Central European University*	26. 01. 2023 Budapest, Hungary
6	**Tamás Szüts**	*Former volunteer for MigSzol Szeged and Migration Aid; Social worker in the Budapest municipality refugee shelter*	28. 01. 2023 Budapest, Hungary
7	**Zsuzsanna Zsohár**	*Former spokesperson and volunteer for Migration Aid Budapest*	29. 01. 2023 Budapest, Hungary
12	**A.N.**	*A former volunteer for SEM (Let's Help Refugees Together)*	25. 01. 2023 Budapest, Hungary
13	**T.S.**	*An economist and public policy analyst in a university in the UK*	09.02.2023 Budapest, Hungary