



The migration effects of armed conflicts between 2020-2025

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*‘Wars never end with a ceasefire:
They continue among the refugees, who carry
the shadow of the battlefield with them.’
Zygmunt Bauman (2016)*

Abstract

Aim: This study examines how the armed conflicts between 2020 and 2025 – most notably the Russian-Ukrainian war – shaped Hungary’s migration landscape, in comparison to the indirect effects of Middle Eastern and African crises.

Methodology: A mixed-methods approach integrates international statistics, legal documents and peer-reviewed literature within a comparative narrative framework.

Findings: The war in Ukraine triggered unprecedented temporary protection mechanisms and generated substantial humanitarian pressure, whereas other conflicts primarily affected Hungary through indirect, Europe-level political and institutional dynamics.

Value: The paper highlights Hungary’s dual migration narrative rooted in the privileging of perceived national interests, along with the challenges of securitisation, offering added value to policy debates and academic research.

Keywords: armed conflict, migration, temporary protection, securitisation

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Introduction

The first twenty-five years of the twenty-first century have clearly demonstrated that armed conflicts are not merely interstate security issues. They generate complex, multidimensional crises that directly affect, for example, European societies. The migration waves triggered by conflicts fundamentally reshape asylum and immigration systems. These processes place an increasing burden on the legal, institutional, economic, and social capacities of states.

Hungary's experiences between 2020 and 2025 particularly sharply reflect these changes. The Russian–Ukrainian war generated severe migratory pressure, unprecedented in the country since the regime change due to its specific typology. The Afghan and Middle Eastern crises exerted indirect effects, while African conflicts impacted Hungary primarily through European refugee policy debates.

The purpose of this essay is to provide an overview of the migration effects of armed conflicts between 2020 and 2025 in Hungary. The analysis focuses on three areas: statistical trends, legal and institutional frameworks, and social and political responses.

Conceptualisation

The examination of migration and armed conflicts requires the precise definition of key concepts. During the source research, the author established that scientific discourse and the practice of international organisations generally apply differing emphases, which often lead to political debates, including in the conceptual frameworks examined in the study. The conceptual interpretations consistently applied in the study and represented by the author are as follows:

- **Accelerated migration:** In the era of globalisation, *'the speed and spatial intensity of migration have increased: mass movements of people occur more rapidly and within shorter periods of time, often as a consequence of suddenly erupting armed conflicts'* (Skeldon, 2017).

According to asylum statistics, for example, during the war in Ukraine, more than 6 million people left the country within three months – *'the fastest population movement in Europe in recent decades'* (URL28). Here, acceleration is measurable in the time dimension: very large groups moved from A to B within a very short period. This fact determined the scope and boundaries of the time frame examined in the research.

- **War and armed conflict:** According to the classical definition, war is *'the organised use of violence between states, intending to enforce political will'*

(Clausewitz, 1976). Modern peace research and international law employ a broader interpretation: an armed conflict is any confrontation in which at least 1,000 fatalities are recorded within one year (SIPRI, 2023).

- **Temporary protection:** According to Council Directive 2001/55/EC of the European Union, temporary protection is an extraordinary mechanism which, in the event of mass influx, provides collective protection without requiring each applicant to undergo an individual procedure (Council of the EU, 2001).
- **Refugee:** Under the 1951 Geneva Convention, a refugee is '*a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality*' (GC, 1951; URL27).

In Hungary, the Act on Asylum regulates the content of asylum provided by Hungary, the conditions for recognition as a refugee, a beneficiary of subsidiary protection, or a person under temporary protection (hereinafter collectively: recognition), as well as the procedure for recognition and its withdrawal. These provisions shall apply to any foreigner who has submitted an application for recognition or enjoys asylum.' (Metv, 2007).

- **Migrant and wanderer:** According to the definition of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), a migrant is any person who leaves their place of residence and settles temporarily or permanently in another country, regardless of legal status (URL20).

In international literature, Park (1928) was the first to describe in his study the migration-theoretical identification of the person (wanderer) who leaves their place of origin and regards this act as independent of its cause, purpose, duration, social perception, or other characteristics.

Hungarian literature distinguishes between the concept emphasising the process of wandering and the politically contextualised use of the term migrant (Gödri, 2020).

- **Push and pull factors:** The classical framework for interpreting migration decisions is the so-called 'push-pull' model. Negative factors in the sending country – e.g. armed conflict, persecution, economic crisis – act as push forces, while positive characteristics of the receiving country – e.g. security, prosperity, employment opportunities, legal protection – function as pull factors (Lee, 1966).
- **Regular and irregular migration:** The defining element of irregular migration is illegality, which arises when entry into a country, crossing its borders, or residence within it occurs in violation of the applicable legal provisions (Hautzinger, 2016). Concerning the dynamic nature of illegality, based on Hautzinger's interpretation, I concur that unlawful residence may become lawful if the legal conditions change (Provera, 2015).

Methodology of the Research

The aim is to explore how and to what extent the armed conflicts between 2020 and 2025 influenced Hungary's migration situation. The methodology of the research is based on a complex approach combining multiple sources and perspectives.

During the research, the author deliberately avoided an empiricist approach, refraining from collecting original data or formulating legal or law enforcement positions. The purpose of this methodological decision is twofold: first, it ensures that the analysis does not slide into normative value judgments; second, it reinforces scientific objectivity (Bryman, 2016).

In processing, the author placed information derived from available international and domestic sources into an analytical, comparative framework and drew conclusions from them. Thus, the emphasis was placed on uncovering connections, differences, and correlations between sources, rather than on the researcher's subjective opinion or legal-administrative position.

Facts considered common knowledge – e.g. the dates of the outbreak of wars, the number of European Union member states, or the institutional structure of the Hungarian asylum system – are recorded without source references, in accordance with international academic practice (APA, 2020). In justified cases, however, particularly in disputed issues, every statement in the study is supported by references, thereby ensuring transparency and verifiability.

The study applies both qualitative and quantitative methods:

- **Quantitative analysis and sources:** based on statistics published by international organisations (e.g. UNHCR, IOM, Eurostat, ECRE, ACLED, ODP, Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH), National Directorate-General for Aliens Policing (OIF), etc.), which authentically document trends in refugee flows, temporary protection, and regular/irregular migration.
- **Qualitative analysis and sources:** based on legal documents (e.g. Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) and European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) judgments), policy reports, and relevant academic literature.

The dual methodological approach (mixed methods) makes it possible to place statistical trends within the context of political and social discourses.

The analysis is longitudinal, covering the period 2020–2025, which can be divided into two main logical phases:

- **2020–2021:** tightening of Hungarian asylum regulation, introduction of the 'embassy procedure', and the consequences of the Afghan crisis.

- **2022–2025:** the Russian–Ukrainian war and the ensuing humanitarian crisis. The geographical focus of the study is Hungary, but the analysis necessarily extends to European and global dimensions, since Hungary’s political and legal frameworks derive from its membership in the UN and the EU.

The analysis is built on two main theoretical pillars:

- **Conflict–migration nexus:** examining the direct and indirect effects of armed conflicts (push factors).
- **Narrative framework:** analysing political discourse and social perception, which determines how the categories of ‘illegal migrant’ and ‘Ukrainian refugee’ are distinguished in Hungarian public discourse.

The study of migration and armed conflicts requires heightened ethical sensitivity. The following principles were applied in the analysis:

- **Data transparency and verifiability** – all statistical data and documents used are presented with precise references (APA 7), ensuring transparency and reproducibility of the research.
- **Awareness of ethical dilemmas** – in studying the relationship between armed conflicts and migration, the danger of ‘securitisation’ may arise, when refugees are primarily portrayed as threats. The analysis sought to avoid this by emphasising humanitarian dimensions and human rights obligations (CPHR, 1950; Arendt, 2007; Bauman, 2016). In the case of Hungary, the mass irregular migration arriving from the Western Balkans in 2015, along with its typological features and impacts, can be identified as an undeniable fact. The phenomenon highlighted what Hautzinger (2024) describes in his study as the idea that security, as a national and global interest, justifies the controlled management of migration to protect the rights of citizens.
- **Reliability of sources** – the research relies exclusively on official data from international organisations and highly cited, peer-reviewed academic works. This minimises the risk of politically distorted data.
- **Handling political sensitivity** – migration is at the centre of political discourse both globally and in Hungary. The analysis aimed at a descriptive, data-based approach, avoiding normative or ideological positions, while critical analysis was grounded in domestic legal norms and international legal standards.
- **Protection of vulnerable groups** – information concerning refugees and irregularly arriving or residing foreigners was used only at the level of aggregated statistical and institutional data.

Armed Conflicts and Their Migration Effects

The armed conflicts of the period 2020–2025 affected Hungary in several ways. Some wars had direct consequences measurable in refugee flows, while others manifested more indirectly, in the form of political and social impacts at the European level. This chapter aims to present which armed conflicts played a decisive role in shaping Hungary’s asylum and migration situation, based on international statistics and academic research.

Figure 1

War and Armed Conflict Areas with Hungarian Involvement (2020–2025)



Note. Prepared by the author.

Russian–Ukrainian War (2022–)

On 2 March 2022, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution ‘most resolutely’ condemning Russia’s aggression against Ukraine and demanding immediate troop withdrawal (URL32). The invasion was thereby interpreted as a serious violation of Article 2(4) of the UN Charter, constituting aggression against international peace and security. Under the framework

of International Humanitarian Law, the war is classified as an international armed conflict (URL19).

A broad consensus has emerged in international legal literature. Clapham (2022) emphasises that the legal qualification of aggression is not merely a political declaration but forms the basis for the application of the entire body of international humanitarian law. Ineli-Ciger (2022) argues that the activation of the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) was ‘a historic milestone in EU refugee law,’ as the previously dormant instrument suddenly became a key mechanism.

Among Hungarian authors, Balogh (2022) highlights that, following the UN resolution, Hungary and the EU were obliged to activate the framework of temporary protection, thereby reinforcing the duty to act in response to aggression and refugee issues. He points out that the activation of the TPD illustrates the double standard: while Ukrainian refugees enjoyed broad support, applicants from the Middle East and Africa continued to face strict restrictions.

On 4 March 2022, the Council of the EU activated the TPD for the first time due to the mass influx of people fleeing Ukraine (Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/382), thereby operationalising the EU directive on temporary protection, which had previously existed for decades as a ‘dormant legal instrument’ (Triandafyllidou & Mantanika, 2023). As a result, more than 4.2 million Ukrainian citizens were granted temporary protection status in the EU (URL12). According to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) data, between 2022 and 2024, more than 6.4 million border crossings were registered at the Ukrainian–Hungarian border, although these included a significant number of commuters and multiple crossings.

Since the beginning of the Russian invasion, Hungary has become one of the most important entry points for those fleeing Ukraine. By the end of 2024, 39,168 individuals were under active TPD protection in Hungary (URL31). The majority of entries were transit in nature, with long-term settlement occurring at a lower rate, yet the TPD system still imposed significant administrative and humanitarian burdens on state and civil structures. To support the country’s migration management structures, there was also demand for the involvement of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (Zán, 2025).

Afghanistan – the Taliban Takeover (2021–)

Following the Taliban takeover in 2021, 8.2 million Afghans were forced to leave their homes, many of whom remained stranded in neighbouring countries. In the EU, more than 100,000 first asylum applications were submitted by

Afghan citizens during 2022–2023. Hardly any asylum applications were lodged in Hungary due to the embassy procedure (URL7). Schmeidl (2022) describes the Afghan refugee issue as ‘one of the world’s longest and most intense refugee crises,’ in which the EU’s divisions are particularly striking.

Kemény (2023) provides a detailed analysis of the political, economic, and humanitarian processes following the Taliban takeover in August 2021, highlighting Afghanistan’s altered role in the global and regional security system and presenting the possible variations of migration events. Petruska (2022) points out in his research that the Taliban takeover had serious consequences for Hungary’s asylum and security regulation – particularly in terms of border security, the application of the temporary protection (TPD) system, and administrative challenges. The study records how the domestic system responded to the new situation at both political and institutional levels.

Syria and Middle Eastern Conflicts

The Syrian war continues to be a major source of refugee flows into Europe. According to European Statistical Office (Eurostat) data (URL10), in 2024, applicants identifying themselves as Syrians were the largest group of asylum seekers in the EU. Their number reached 148,185, accounting for more than 16% of all applicants, according to European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) data (URL8). This confirms that the Syrian crisis is one of the most generalised drivers of migration perceptible at the European level (URL21).

In Hungary, the situation is markedly different: the number of Syrian asylum applications typically hovered around ten per year (URL2). By contrast, several international researchers have pointed out that the Syrian crisis generated European institutional responses, such as temporary protection models (e.g. TPD) and relocation mechanisms introduced in reaction to successive waves.

In academic literature, Betts (2019) argues that the Syrian conflict functioned as ‘a stress test for the EU asylum system,’ which in the long term led to new legal norms and institutional innovations.

Migration Instrumentalised by Belarus (2021–)

In 2021, the Belarusian regime organised the movement of approximately 7,698 foreign refugees and migrants towards the external borders of the EU (URL11). According to the European Parliament and numerous analysts, this process represented a classic case of the ‘weaponisation of migration,’ and thus forms part of the subject matter of this study (URL9).

The Belarus–EU border crisis of 2021 clearly demonstrated that the migration wave facilitated by Belarus could be regarded as a political instrument and as part of hybrid warfare. The analysis of the Hybrid CoE highlighted that state-organised migration created new rules, as the Belarusian regime militarily and logistically assisted migrants in exerting pressure on EU borders, thereby instrumentalising migration as a hybrid threat (URL15, URL18). Jansen (2022) describes the phenomenon as ‘a new tool of hybrid warfare,’ fundamentally altering European asylum discourse.

Belarus deliberately eased visa regulations to admit large numbers of third-country migrants, then organised their transport to the Polish, Latvian, and Lithuanian border sections to exert pressure on the European Union to lift previous sanctions (URL25). In this case, migrants served as objectified instruments of external, deliberate, targeted organisation, their fundamental human rights violated by a transit country exercising political pressure, even involving actual armed aggression against those defending the opposite side of the border (Geddes & Scholten, 2016; Betts & Collier, 2018).

Although Hungary was not directly targeted by this operation, in political and regulatory terms, it supported the EU’s ‘externalisation’ approach. Nevertheless, Hungary’s position and political rhetoric strongly resonated with EU narratives rejecting Belarusian migration. In domestic migration policy discourse – particularly in the categories of ‘instrumentalisation’ and ‘hybrid threat’ – Hungary consistently supported EU-style restrictive measures and the strengthening of border protection, which amounted to passive support for the EU’s general legal and operational response (e.g. fences, legislative amendments).

Sudan – Civil War (2023–)

The Sudanese civil war that broke out in 2023 resulted, according to UNHCR data, in 14.3 million forcibly displaced persons by the end of 2024, making the conflict one of the world’s most severe humanitarian crises (URL30).

De Waal (2023) considers the Sudanese situation to be an example of ‘new types of fragmented civil wars,’ which generate rapid, mass migratory movements. He emphasises that the characteristics of these conflicts include the absence of control by a political centre (government), the fragmented structure of armed groups, and the fact that the mass displacement of civilians often becomes a deliberate instrument of warfare.

In the Sudanese civil war, the collapse of humanitarian infrastructure – e.g. food and water shortages, the breakdown of the health system – created conditions that made displacement unavoidable. De Waal also points out that refugee

flows originating from Sudan not only overstretch the capacities of neighbouring Chad, South Sudan, and Egypt, but also indirectly affect Europe, as the proportion of Sudanese citizens increased along the Mediterranean route and the Balkan transit routes.

Hungary was not directly affected by the Sudanese refugee wave, but indirectly so through the reconfiguration of Mediterranean and Balkan routes.

Nagorno-Karabakh (2023)

According to the International Crisis Group (ICG) report (URL16), in September 2023, more than 100,000 people fled to Armenia from Nagorno-Karabakh, making it one of the most severe humanitarian crises in the region. UNHCR data indicate that by early 2024, the number of registered Karabakh refugees in Armenia exceeded 105,000, representing more than 3% of the country's population – proportionally one of the highest refugee admission rates in the world (URL29).

Cornell (2023) interprets the crisis as 'a complete community exodus,' which, within a few days, led to the near-total relocation of the population (p. 14). He highlights that mass migration caused not only physical but also psychosocial crises: refugees struggled with trauma, reception capacities were overstretched, and the challenges of social integration threatened the sustainability of regional stability.

No direct refugee wave arrived in Hungary, but the indirect effects of asylum applications from Armenia intensified along the Balkan route: according to Eurostat data, between 2023 and 2024, nearly 8,000 Armenian citizens submitted first asylum applications in the EU, predominantly in Germany and France, but in smaller numbers also in Hungary (URL11).

The Hungary Helps Program (HPP) (URL14) provided HUF 40 million in support for Armenian refugees and an additional €102,000 donation was delivered by the Hungarian Embassy to the Armenian Red Cross to strengthen humanitarian assistance (URL24). According to some researchers, this narrative fits well with the duality characteristic of Hungarian migration policy: while applicants from the Middle East and Africa continued to face a rejecting, securitising discourse, the support of Christian Armenians appeared as a humanitarian responsibility.

Summary (Annexes 2–3-4-5) and Analysis

The armed conflicts of the period 2020–2025 shaped the international migration environment in diverse ways and had both direct and indirect impacts on Hungary's situation.

Figure 2*Statistical Summary – Wars and Migration Impacts with Hungarian Involvement (2020–2025)*

Conflict	Period	International displacement (million)	EU/EU+ applications (annual)	Direct impact on Hungary	Indirect impact on Hungary
Russian–Ukrainian War	2022–	6.4 M border crossings toward HU (2022–2024); 5.9 M refugees in the EU	1.2 M+ temporary protection (2022)	39,168 under TPD protection (end-2024); 49,119 applications (2022–24)	Civil-state capacity expansion: humanitarian coordination
Afghanistan	2021–	8.2 M forced displacement in the region	100,000+ applications/year in the EU	Marginal in HU (due to embassy procedure)	EU internal debates: relocation mechanisms
Syria	2011–	6.8 M refugees (Turkey, Lebanon as main destinations)	148,000+ applications in the EU (2023)	HU: <50 applications/year	EU relocation debates: institutional reforms
Belarusian instrumentalisation	2021–	~7,700 organised arrivals (PL, LT, LV)	Not asylum pressure; primarily border incidents	HU: no direct inflow	Political support: EU externalisation strategy
Sudan	2023–	14.3 M IDPs + refugees (end-2024)	EU applications rising, but at low levels	HU: none	Route effects: Mediterranean–Balkan corridor strengthening
Nagorno-Karabakh	2023	105,000+ to Armenia (≈3% population increase)	Marginal in the EU (~8,000 apps/year)	HU: a few dozen applications	Regional destabilisation: EU resource reallocation

Note. Prepared by the author.

The consequences of the Russian–Ukrainian war were presented in a separate subsection; here, in summary: the activation of the TPD was a precedent-setting step, while Hungary reinforced its role as a transit country (URL31; URL11).

The Afghan crisis posed a different type of challenge: although the Taliban takeover generated mass displacement, hardly any applications were registered in Hungary due to the tightening of asylum regulations.

The Syrian conflict remained a major source of asylum applications in Europe, but Hungary responded primarily with political rather than humanitarian measures.

Migration instrumentalised by the Belarusian regime appeared as a new type of threat; no direct influx occurred, but the political narrative aligned with the EU framework.

The Sudanese civil war and the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis had primarily indirect effects: refugee flows from the affected countries intensified along the Mediterranean and Balkan routes, while Hungary contributed to alleviating regional crises through humanitarian support.

Reflections by the UN and the EU clearly indicated that new instruments and mechanisms were required in response to the war events, while Hungary's political narrative consistently applied double standards to different refugee groups.

Due to the asymmetry of events in the period under review, only the Russian–Ukrainian war resulted in large-scale, direct refugee flows towards Hungary. The effects of other conflicts manifested primarily indirectly: in EU political debates, regional instability, and the reallocation of humanitarian resources. This clearly illustrates the selective nature of Hungary's role as a 'front country.'

In the case of Afghan and Syrian asylum seekers, Hungary virtually disappeared from admission statistics due to the introduction of the embassy declaration system. This legal institution provoked numerous international criticisms and led to several proceedings before the Court of Justice of the European Union. Nevertheless, in domestic political discourse, the regulation continued to function as a source of legitimacy.

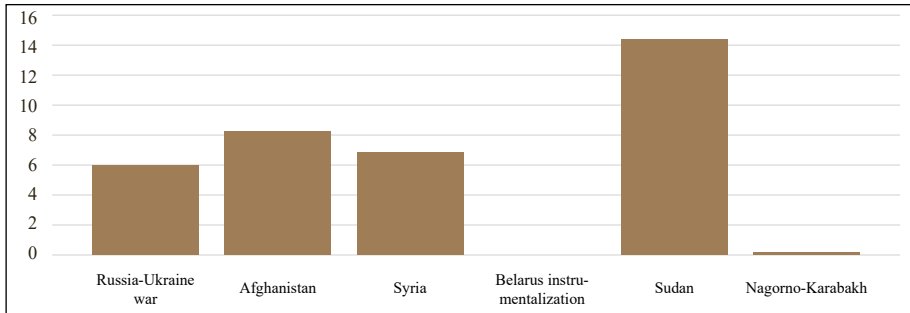
The border pressure organised by the Belarusian regime in 2021 exemplifies the use of migration as a political weapon, fundamentally reshaping European asylum discourse. Hungary reinforced both rhetorically and politically the narratives of externalisation and border closure, in line with the government's securitising communication.

As examples of global peripheral conflicts, the Sudanese and Nagorno-Karabakh crises demonstrate how Hungary becomes indirectly involved in such sequences of events. The former through the reconfiguration of Mediterranean and Balkan routes, the latter through the reallocation of EU humanitarian resources, both impacting Hungary's migration and political environment. Indirect involvement thus simultaneously represents a structural challenge and an expansion of foreign policy room for manoeuvre.

The data reinforce the relevance of the classical 'push–pull model': armed conflicts functioned as typical push factors, while Hungary institutionally restricted pull factors. The 'securitisation theory' (Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde, 1998; Huysmans, 2006) highlights that the political framing and securitisation of asylum seekers had at least as great an impact on practical access as the conflicts themselves.

Figure 3

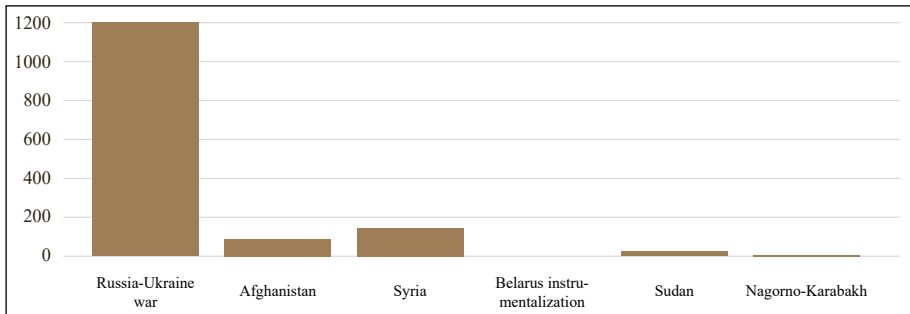
Displacement Caused by Armed Conflicts in the Period 2020–2025



Note. Prepared by the author.

Figure 4

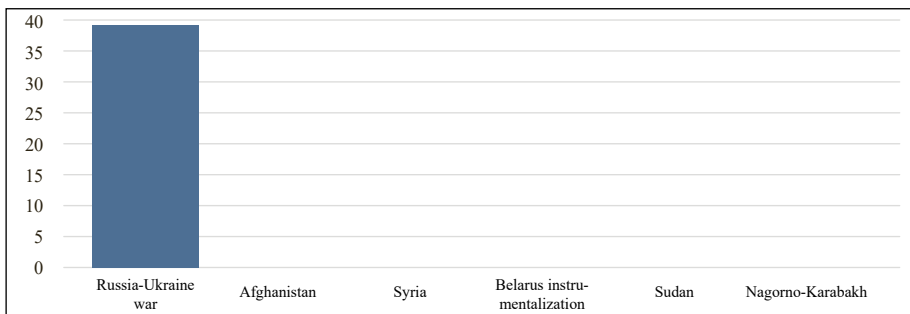
EU/EU+ Registered Asylum Applications in the Period 2020–2025



Note. Prepared by the author.

Figure 5

Number of Registered Asylum and TPD Applicants in Hungary in the Period 2020–2025



Note. Prepared by the author.

Dual Narrative in Hungary (2020–2025)

One of the most distinctive features of Hungarian migration policy between 2020 and 2025 can be evaluated as a dual narrative: while the rejection of ‘illegal migrants’ became a central element of communication, the reception of Ukrainian refugees appeared as a legitimate and politically supported act. This duality was perceptible not only rhetorically but also at legal and institutional levels.

Legal Background and the ‘Embassy Procedure’

Act LVIII of 2020 and Government Decree 292/2020 (VI. 17.) introduced the so-called ‘embassy procedure.’ Under this system, asylum applications could only be submitted at designated foreign missions – e.g. in Belgrade or Kyiv. This practice fundamentally differed from the direct submission regulated by Act LXXX of 2007. The amended system significantly restricted international access, which the Court of Justice of the European Union declared unlawful in the case *Commission v. Hungary* (C-823/21) in 2023 (URL5).

The declaration of intent is a preliminary, non-qualifying procedural act that does not constitute an asylum application, and may only be submitted at Hungarian diplomatic missions designated by law, serving as a precondition for subsequent access to the actual asylum procedure.

Domestic scholars such as Friedery and Molnár (2024) assess the embassy procedure as a systemic restriction on access to asylum, one that in practice renders the lodging of applications nearly impossible. They point out that the scheme is incompatible with EU procedural guarantees, a conclusion reinforced by the *C-823/21* judgment. In their view, the regulation constitutes a means of substantively hollowing out the Hungarian asylum system.

In Blutman’s (2025) analysis, the embassy procedure functions as a preliminary administrative filter that is incompatible with the very purpose of the right to asylum and obstructs access to protection. He underscores that the structure of the procedure is legally and conceptually at odds with EU asylum law norms.

The Dual (Political) Narrative (Figure 6)

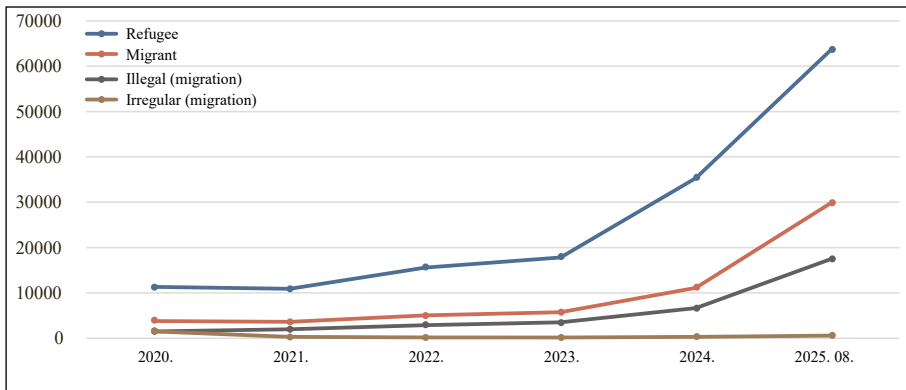
Political communication presented migration issues within a dual framework. Ukrainian refugees were placed in the category of ‘neighbours to be protected’: they received institutional support through the HPP, and Hungary, by activating the EU directive on temporary protection, granted legal status to tens of thousands of Ukrainian refugees.

By contrast, applicants from the Middle East and Africa were consistently identified in governmental communication as ‘illegal migrants,’ which Glied (2020) interpreted as a deliberate political instrument of double standards.

Surányi & Bognár (2025) show that, compared to 2015, the discourse on migrants and refugees underwent a significant transformation in 2022 in the context of the war in Ukraine. Ukrainian refugees were framed as ‘real’ or ‘deserving refugees,’ whereas those arriving from the Middle East and Africa had previously been typically identified as ‘illegal migrants’ or ‘undeserving immigrants.’

Other analyses – for example, studies of political communication – also confirm that in government campaign messages the label ‘illegal migrant’ was frequent, while the term ‘irregular’ did not appear publicly at the campaign level (Szabó, 2019). This discourse fits into the logic of ‘securitisation theory’ (Buzan et al., 1998; Huysmans, 2006), according to which framing migration as a security threat legitimises legal restrictions.

Figure 6
Hungarian Dual Narrative – Online Representations in the Period 2020–2025, Interval VIII



Note. Edited by the author.

International Context and Comparison

Hungarian practice is not without precedent, as in the past decade several states have applied similar externalisation mechanisms to regulate access to asylum.

On 6 November 2023, Italy and Albania agreed in a bilateral protocol whereby Italy could transfer asylum seekers rescued at sea to Albania, where procedures would take place in designated centres – still under Italian jurisdiction. In these temporary reception centres, applications for protection were submitted, heard, and adjudicated to prevent and deter migrants from entering EU territory

(Broerse, 2024). This model fits into the strategy of ‘externalisation,’ which relocates preliminary screening of applications outside EU borders.

The United States’ ‘Remain in Mexico’ programme (URL26), or ‘Migrant Protection Protocols’ (MPP), entered into force in January 2019 and required asylum seekers applying in the United States to remain in Mexico until their applications were adjudicated – often for months or even years (URL3). According to Amnesty International, this practice severely restricted access to asylum and exposed applicants in border cities – e.g. Matamoros or Nuevo Laredo – to ‘life without security, violence, exploitation, and mass returns’ (URL4).

The ‘Safe Third Country Agreement’ (STCA) between Canada and the United States has been in force since 29 December 2004 (URL22). Under the agreement, asylum seekers arriving from a third country must apply for protection in the country first deemed ‘safe’ – i.e. in the United States for Canada, and vice versa – unless they meet one of the exceptions defined by the agreement (URL33).

The agreement is based on Canada’s ‘Immigration and Refugee Protection Act’ (URL13; URL17), which stipulates that only a country guaranteeing protection in accordance with asylum and human rights obligations may be designated as a safe third country.

On 25 March 2023, the STCA ‘Additional Protocol’ entered into force, extending the application of the STCA to irregular crossings (between official border points, including waterways). Under the new rule, entrants in this manner are not entitled to submit applications within the first 14 days and may be returned to the USA unless they fall under an exception. The regulation aimed to close loopholes (e.g. ‘Roxham Road’¹) and organise asylum application procedures more systematically.

1 Roxham Road (French: Chemin Roxham) is a small rural road in the province of Québec, located on the Canadian–American border between Champlain (New York State, USA) and Saint-Bernard-de-Lacolle (Québec, Canada). It became well known because, from the mid-2010s, thousands of asylum seekers used it as an ‘irregular border crossing’ to enter Canada from the United States.

Under the STCA, anyone attempting to claim asylum at an official border crossing may be returned to the USA. However, the agreement originally applied only to official crossings. Circumventing this rule, many asylum seekers crossed via nearby country roads, most notably at Roxham Road, and immediately requested asylum from Canadian authorities. Between 2017 and 2022, tens of thousands of people arrived in Canada in this way each year, primarily from Haiti, Nigeria, Latin America, and Middle Eastern countries. The location became a focal point of political debate in Canada: tensions frequently arose between Québec and the federal government over resources and reception capacity. On 25 March 2023, with the entry into force of the STCA Additional Protocol, the rules were extended to irregular crossings as well. This effectively closed the ‘loophole’ of Roxham Road: those crossing there could also be returned to the USA unless they fell under one of the exceptions. The site was closed by Canadian authorities, with police and border guard presence ensuring that asylum seekers could no longer use it as before. The term ‘Roxham Road’ has since acquired symbolic significance in Canadian public discourse and international academic debates: it has become a symbol of irregular migration and border policy controversies.

In 2022, the United Kingdom announced the ‘Migration and Economic Development Partnership,’ which would have transferred the adjudication of asylum seekers arriving irregularly to Rwanda. According to the government narrative, this was intended as a deterrent and built on the concept of a ‘safe third country,’ while fundamental rights and academic critiques emphasised violations of the principle of non-refoulement², rule of law concerns, and cost issues. In November 2023, the Supreme Court (URL1) declared the policy unlawful. Although the Safety of Rwanda Act (2024) legally designated Rwanda as safe, the programme was not implemented following the 2024 change of government (URL23). The Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill, introduced in 2025, aims to repeal the Rwanda Act (URL6).

Figure 7
International Comparison – Externalisation Mechanisms

Country / Agreement	Location / Mechanism	Guarantees / Legal Protection	Criticisms / Problems
Hungary – Embassy procedure	Submission of a declaration of intent at designated Hungarian embassies (e.g. Belgrade, Kyiv)	No independent legal remedy; severely restricted access	CJEU ruling (2023) found it violates EU law and access to asylum
Italy – Albania agreement (2023)	Examination of asylum applications on Albanian territory before entry into the EU	EU-level agreement, formally within the EU legal framework, but implementation is disputed	NGOs argue that Albania’s capacities are limited and legal guarantees are weak
USA – Migrant Protection Protocols (Remain in Mexico)	Asylum seekers are required to remain in Mexico until their claims are processed	Mexico declared ‘safe,’ but actual protection is lacking	Serious human rights concerns; asylum seekers exposed to violence
Canada – USA Safe Third Country Agreement (2004–)	Asylum seekers must apply in the country of first entry	Formal exceptions (e.g. family reunification); legal guarantees exist	Rights advocates argue it reduces access, though it operates within a legitimate legal framework

Note. Edited by the author – source: according to the reference list.

Summary

In summary, these examples demonstrate that restrictions on access to asylum are not unique to Hungary but form part of a broader international trend. The impacts of the Russian–Ukrainian war and the activation of the TPD, as well as the dual narrative, were presented in detail in Chapters 4–5.

Figure 7 presents four different externalisation mechanisms, except for the unimplemented UK model, which relocates access to asylum procedures outside

2 As enshrined in Article 33 of the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention and Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

the destination country. Hungary's embassy procedure, the Italy–Albania agreement, the US 'Remain in Mexico' programme, and the Canada–USA 'Safe Third Country Agreement' all exemplify that asylum applications are often not adjudicated directly in the host country. While the models follow similar logic, significant differences can be observed in legal safeguards and the severity of international criticism.

Conclusions

Hungary's dual political narrative defined perceptions during the period under review (see 5.2). While the Italian–Albanian and Canada–USA models contain certain legal safeguards and operate within EU or bilateral frameworks, Hungarian regulation provides less access to international protection. Consequently, Hungarian practice received sharper criticism in international forums, particularly from the Court of Justice of the European Union.

Based on the experiences of 2020–2025, the migration effects of armed conflicts offer three main lessons for Hungary:

- **Need for flexibility:** current legal frameworks are too rigid; the 'embassy procedure' practically renders access to asylum impossible.
- **Strengthening civil–state cooperation:** the Ukrainian refugee crisis demonstrated that the civil sphere plays a key role in crisis management.
- **Necessity of narrative change:** for long-term social stability, a more unified and less stigmatising communication may be required.

Summary (2020–2025)

The study aimed to analyse the migratory consequences of armed conflicts between 2020 and 2025, as well as their global, European, and Hungarian interconnections. In processing, the author relied on international research databases, peer-reviewed academic studies, and policy reports. The applied methodology combined statistical data analysis, literature review, and comparative perspective. This enabled the identification of both direct and indirect effects of war events and the evaluation of Hungarian specificities within a European context.

At the global level, armed conflicts remained the primary source of forced migration. According to UNHCR data, by the end of 2024 the number of forcibly displaced persons exceeded 114 million, surpassing all previous figures. Conflicts had differing dynamics: the Syrian and Afghan crises generated protracted and massive refugee flows, while the Sudanese and Nagorno-Karabakh

events triggered rapid, region-specific but intense displacements. Accordingly, the global migration map was continuously reconfigured, particularly along Mediterranean and Balkan transit routes.

At the level of the European Union, the Ukrainian refugee wave and the activation of the TPD posed unprecedented challenges for the EU; see Chapter 4.1. In the case of other conflicts, however, the EU response focused more on strengthening external border protection, introducing externalisation practices (e.g. the Italy–Albania agreement), and accelerating asylum procedures. According to Eurostat data, between 2023 and 2024, the largest groups of asylum seekers in the EU were Ukrainian, Syrian, and Afghan citizens. The Belarusian crisis exemplified the use of migration as a geopolitical instrument; see Chapter 4.4.

From a comparative perspective, Hungary’s situation was dual. Among the V4 countries, Poland and the Czech Republic played a greater role in the long-term reception of Ukrainian refugees, while Hungary functioned as a transit country, with asylum applications remaining significantly lower. Compared with Western Balkan EU border states, Hungary’s legal regulation was stricter, representing a distinctive regulatory path: humanitarian assistance for certain groups was coupled with the systematic restriction of access to asylum.

At the institutional level in Hungary, the Russian–Ukrainian war imposed the greatest direct burden. The Ministry of Interior and the National Directorate-General for Aliens Policing were significantly engaged in the registration of refugees and the operation of the TPD system. In parallel, civil organisations and international partners, including the Hungary Helps Program, played a key role in providing humanitarian assistance. The effects of the embassy procedure are discussed in detail in Section 5.1.

At the societal level, Hungary’s dual political narrative (see Section 5.2) shaped perceptions. The reception of Ukrainian refugees enjoyed broad social and political support, while the stigmatisation of applicants from the Middle East and Africa persisted. This difference shaped both public discourse and the legitimacy of migration policy. Refugee waves thus created new tensions not only at the institutional but also at the societal level, which may determine the directions of Hungarian migration policy in the long term.

In summary, the war events of 2020–2025 clearly demonstrated that Hungary’s migration situation was simultaneously built on addressing direct humanitarian challenges and managing indirect European political processes.

Among the conflicts examined, the war between Russia and Ukraine had by far the most significant and direct impact on Hungary, both in terms of the unprecedented scale of refugee arrivals and the intensity of domestic and EU-level policy responses.

The strengthening of global trends, the development of EU solidarity mechanisms, and the tightening of domestic legal regulation together created the dual structure that defined Hungary's responses to the migratory challenges of war.

Further Research Objectives

The analysis of the migratory consequences of armed conflicts between 2020 and 2025 provides a basis for interpreting the current situation. However, due to the complexity and continuous change of the subject, it is justified to designate further directions of research. The most important research objectives can be formulated as follows:

- **Data-driven forecasting and application of artificial intelligence:** Quantitative modelling of migratory pressure resulting from armed conflicts, particularly examining which regions are likely to generate new refugee waves and how these may affect Hungary and the European Union.
- **Evaluation of EU-level mechanisms:** Assessment of the long-term functioning of the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) activated in 2022, as well as analysis of the expected impacts of the forthcoming new Migration and Asylum Pact for Hungary and the region.
- **Examination of long-term integration:** Study of the social, labour market, and educational integration of groups of Ukrainian refugees remaining in Hungary, and comparison with the experiences of earlier migrant communities.
- **Institutional adaptation:** Analysis of the capacities, resource utilisation, and operational models of state actors (Ministry of Interior, National Directorate-General for Aliens Policing) and civil actors (NGOs, Hungary Helps Program) to explore the extent to which sustainable responses to crises have been achieved.
- **Examination of legal-policy consequences:** Analysis of the long-term effects of the 'embassy procedure' on Hungarian asylum statistics, and comparison with the externalisation practices of other EU member states.
- **Dual narrative and social perception:** Empirical research to explore how Hungarian society perceives Ukrainian refugees and applicants from the Middle East and Africa; comparison of media discourse and public opinion surveys.
- **Regional comparison:** Exploration of Hungary's position among the Visegrád Four and Western Balkan states, with particular attention to differences and similarities in political and institutional responses to crises.

These research directions can be considered crucial not only from scientific and migration law enforcement perspectives but also for the future of Hungarian society.

Outlook and Lessons for 2025

In 2025, the European Union is preparing for the implementation of the Migration and Asylum Pact, the aim of which is to harmonise procedures and strengthen coordination among member states. The experiences of recent years have highlighted that asylum and border protection have increasingly become interconnected issues.

The added value of the research lies in presenting the migratory impacts of armed conflicts from a comparative perspective, with particular attention to the specificities of the Central European region. The examination of narratives made it possible to uncover how political and social framings shape perceptions of refugees. This approach also offers new perspectives within migration studies.

For the future, it is crucial that asylum policies are able to respond to the changing dynamics of armed conflicts, and that international and regional cooperation continues to uphold humanitarian principles. The analyses have demonstrated that flexible and forward-looking solutions can contribute to the effective management of future crises.

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The 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol are the cornerstone of international refugee protection.

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