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Conditions of Minorities

*Zoltán Dövényi*

**Some regional aspects  
of the international migration  
in Hungary**

**1. Introduction**

The socialist era was characterized by immobility across the borders; the socialist countries – Hungary among them – tried to avoid allowing great numbers of foreigners on their territory. At the end of the 1980s the changes of regimes brought important changes in this respect too, and the fall of the iron curtain did away with the social migration policy.

Permeable borders helped Hungary to join the stream of international mobility with all its advantages and disadvantages. The increasing number of foreigners coming to Hungary in the wake of developments raised the interest of scholars and now there is already a long list of references to the matter. Results cannot be denied, but the research is uneven, some aspects have been satisfactorily researched others left unnoticed.

Among the latter should be mentioned the analysis of the regional distribution of international migration. The present study is an attempt at this field. Due to restrictions of the length of the paper only some questions can be treated but with the help of maps and figures much can be enlightened.

**2. The regional distribution of foreigners staying in Hungary**

Since the number of foreigners increases year by year, surpassing the number of emigrants, it is calculated that there are more than 100,000 persons, though the exact figure is not known. In the 1990s the number of foreigners continuously grew and by the year 2000 it was over 153,000. The following year a new calculating system was introduced and the number was given as 110,000 in 2001.

Thus causes difficulties in handling the matter satisfactorily; since there is a break in the line of data the processes cannot be evaluated in progress because the changes do not relate to real life processes but are simply ones made in the statistical systems. Under such circumstances it

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is advisable to concentrate on the period after the year 2000 and make no references – or only with restriction – to earlier events and developments.

This is why the regional distribution of foreigners staying in Hungary will be analysed in a given time: the year 2002. The following important facts can be established:

- About the half of the foreign citizens was living in Budapest and County Pest, in the neighbourhood of the capital. Thus a large proportion of them are concentrated at a small region of Hungary.
- The other counties lag behind the Budapest region; it is only in the Counties Csongrád, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg where more than 5,000 persons lived. In the Counties Vas, Tolna, Nógrád and Heves the figure was less than 2000.
- Foreign citizens coming from different countries are concentrated in different regions of Hungary, thus several types of characteristics can be defined.
- In largest numbers Romanian citizens are represented who form considerable groups in most of the counties, they do not form the largest groups only in the Counties Csongrád and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg. Their preferred area is Budapest and its neighbourhood and they rarely choose the eastern parts of the country bordering Romania.
- The Ukrainian, Slovakian and Yugoslav citizens prefer the counties neighbouring their original country i.e. the Counties Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, Győr-Moson-Sopron and Csongrád.
- The Chinese citizens show the densest settling pattern, 4/5 of them live in the Capital.
- In the case of the citizens coming from EU countries there is a pronounced West - East dichotomy; they mostly settled down in the western part of the Hungary (the capital and its neighbourhood included); they have chosen the eastern part frequently.
- According to their habitat the foreign citizens are mostly urban living in larger towns and cities, only 1/5 of them in villages. This is a much lower figure than the one of the Hungarian population. (*Fig. 1.*)

The positioning of the foreigners in Hungary is not only regionally different but also according to the recipient settlements. It is important that the settlements preferred by foreign citizens only partially correspond to the hierarchy of the settlement network. The situation of Budapest is unam-

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biguous because the capital of the country is at the same time the biggest recipient. The importance of the capital's commuter belt is indicated by the fact that there are three towns where foreigners are conglomerated: Budaörs, Érd, Gödöllő neither of which belongs to the first line of Hungarian towns, either by the size of their population or by playing any kind of central role. A similar interest was focussed of Gyula, the former county town which shares the place with Békéscsaba, the present county town.

Asymmetry appears only in the case of the largest recipient settlements. The towns coming in line after Budapest are all on the Great Hungarian Plane near the border. Of them Szeged comes first with 6,000 registered foreign citizens. A considerable increase in immigration from Transcarpathia is indicated by the elevation of Nyíregyháza to a leading target town. (Fig. 2.)

For a long time there were no data about the mother tongue and nationality of foreign citizens. It was generally accepted that their majority was ethnic Hungarian or had Hungarian as their mother tongue but it was impossible to justify it numerically. The 2001 census brought important changes by inquiring about the mother tongue and ethnicity along with nationality. Since the data were published on county level at last there is an opportunity to analyse the question regionally.

The census registered the mother tongue of more than 87,000 foreign citizens, including those who did not give an answer or whose mother tongue was unknown. Double citizens were excluded from the count, this is why the figure is lower than the above-mentioned 110,000.

65% of the 87,000 foreigners declared to have Hungarian as their mother tongue and if those are also considered who did not give an answer to this question and those who were unknown, the number could be higher, 78.3%. The importance of those who has Hungarian as their mother tongue is implied by the fact that German citizens, who are present in the second largest numbers represent only 5.4%, Romanians 3.3%. The 2.6% share of the Chinese and the 2% of the Ukrainians is also noteworthy.

It is no surprise, therefore, that in every county as well as in Budapest the majority of foreigners had Hungarian, as their mother tongue, the regional distribution, however, is very different in the various regions. While they represent 50% in Budapest, in County Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg it is more than 82%. There is a kind of West–East dichotomy: on the Great Hungarian Plain the proportion of Hungarian speakers is higher than in Transdanubia. It is the opposite in the case of the Germans taking the second place: they are more represented in Transdanubia. This

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shows the differences in the migration routes. Migration routes explain that there are more Ukrainians in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, Romanians in the southern part of the Great Plain, and Croatians in the southern part of Transdanubia.

Budapest is worth mentioning for the language point of view. The importance of the capital is expressed not only in the number of foreigners living there but also in the structure they occupy. The foreigners living in Budapest have a much more differentiated structure; there are several language groups which can be found only in Budapest (Africa, Arabian, Modern Hebrew, Armenian, etc.).

The social economic influence of the foreign citizens living in Hungary is defined by their age. It must not be forgotten that the Hungary's demographic resources have been exhausted, therefore people belonging to the younger age groups are necessary even if – due their small number - they cannot reverse the unfavourable demographic processes.

Analysing the age-structure of the foreigners in Hungary taken as a continuum, the increase of the proportion of the older generation is conspicuous. The age structure of the indigenous population and that of the foreigners are approaching to one another thus the demographic advantage is about to diminish.

As is usual in work-oriented communities, the proportion of children and young persons is low: 15% in contrast to the 23.3% of the indigenous population. The regional differences follow a similar pattern as in the case of the over-60 year old group: the proportion of the younger than 19 year old group is 10.5%, in County Veszprém, but 23.7% in County Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg. Along the Ukrainian and Romanian border the proportion of the young persons is higher than average and since in this area the share of the older age group is also higher than average, it means that the proportion of population of working age is relatively low. Budapest and its neighbourhood represents the opposite where the share of old and young age groups is equally lower than average, thus the work force potential is higher.

### 3. The regional distribution of Hungary's new citizens

One of the important outcomes of international migration is that over 100,000 persons were naturalized between 1990 and 2001, about 10,000 new citizens per year. Before the change of regime it was less than a tenth of this number.

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As the population of Hungary has been continuously decreasing since 1981 the new citizens improve the unfavourable population tendencies. The balance is also improved by the fact that there were only 13,000 persons who renounced their Hungarian citizenship. It is the more important because there were fears in the time of the change of regime that people would leave their citizenship in great numbers; fortunately this was not the case.

As to the original citizenship of the new Hungarian citizens, it is clear that only few persons are involved. Hungary is in the focus of interest mainly of persons from neighbouring countries where ethnic Hungarians are living in great numbers. Of the 76 500 persons who were naturalized between 1993 and 2001 about 50,000 (64.5%) were formerly citizens of Romania, more than 9,200 (12.%) of Yugoslavia, about 5,700 (7.5%) of Ukraina. Even several of the 3,786 (4.9%) former Russian citizens most probably had Hungarian as their mother tongue.

The above four states have provided the 90% of the naturalized persons, thus the rest of the world has been represented by the remaining 10%. There is a lack of interest in the EU-countries, shown by the 600 applicants for naturalization. The Chinese living in Hungary are rarely naturalized (between 1993 and 2001 there were only 29 persons) Vietnamese somewhat more frequently (162 persons).

The regional distribution of the persons naturalized between 1993 and 2001 is roughly the same as that of the foreigners permanently staying in Hungary. Their main habitat is Budapest and its commuting belt. In the period under scrutiny every fourth of them was living in Budapest, every sixth in County Pest – mainly in the commuting belt. It is noteworthy that the concentration lessened during the period: while in 1993–1994 45% of the newly naturalized lived in Central Hungary, by the end of the period it was less than 40%.

The other centre of gathering for the new citizens is the southern part of the Great Hungarian Plain where they live especially in County Csongrád (1993–2001: almost 6,000 persons). In contrast to Budapest the share of this region is increasing: in 1993–1994 it was 13-14%, at the end of the period 20%.

Compared to the national average the number of new citizens is high in the Counties Hajdú-Bihar and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, along the Romanian border (about 4,000 persons each), in other part of the country it is much lower, sometimes negligible (e.g. in County Nógrád). It is valid even in the case of such counties where the economic situation would make possible the settling down of larger groups (e.g. in County Vas).

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The level of urbanisation of the new citizens is also notable: while two thirds of the indigenous population lives in towns it is three quarters in the case of the new citizens. It is though understandable since the new comers have better chances in towns to settle down than in villages. The county towns Debrecen and Szeged are the habitat of many of them. (Fig. 3.)

Since there are more women than men (about 55–45%), it increases the generally higher proportion of women; otherwise, the new citizens improve the age-structure even though on a small scale because they belong to a younger generation than the indigenous population. Though they show ageing tendencies: 1993: 30.2 years, 2000: 35.3 years in average, and if this tendency continues the minimal influence on age-improving will disappear.

### 4. Hungary and the migratory process from East to West

In her 1,000-year history Hungary frequently served as the 'highway of people', i.e. frequently was the scene of the so-called international migration. There were always economic, social or political causes in the background triggering these movements. There is also the geographical situation as a general feature which is a general aspect playing a role in all the times. A glance at the map explains that most of the movements of people were unavoidable.

The first of the reasons is that the routes connecting various parts of Europe cut through the Carpathian Basin and thus through Hungary. Since these routes are used legally as well as for illegal purposes, the activities concentrate in the region, this means that all types of international migration can be observed in Hungary.

In addition to immigration and emigration there is the frequently referred to function of a 'ferry country', i.e. that of providing contact between East and West. If we accept that Europe is basically divided into two parts, then the majority of the immigrants come from east heading west. Transmigration and refugee routes show a similar pattern. The transit function of Hungary appears most clearly in the fact that migrants who come from distant parts of the Asia and Africa (most frequently illegally) try to reach their destination in Western Europe via Hungary. (Fig. 4.)

It is not unimportant for the future if this trend will be permanent or will change considerably. There are several signs indicating the former. This is supported by the population forecasts of the world till the year 2050: the

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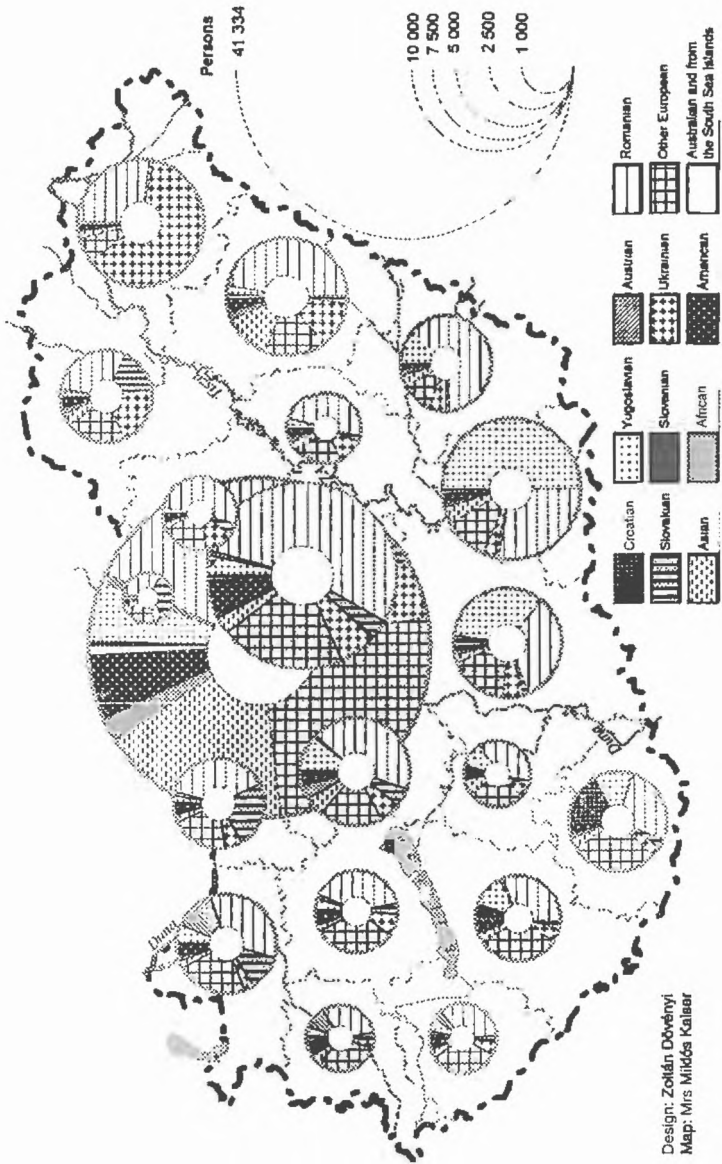
increase of the population is expected to dramatically increase in those areas from where considerable masses of people have already moved across Hungary. While in the meantime Europe's share of the world's population has been halved the intensity of transmigration has to be expected.

This in-between situation can bring advantages as well as disadvantages for Hungary. If the country could pick the suitable groups from the 'population bonus' in order to improve the unfavourable demographic situation the geographical situation could work out profitably; if the main aim will be to try to fend off illegal immigration, a fairly hopeless battle as it is, than Hungary will loose the struggle by passing over the possibility to win. Whatever the outcome, it will depend on the future Hungarian migration policy.

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Fig. 1.

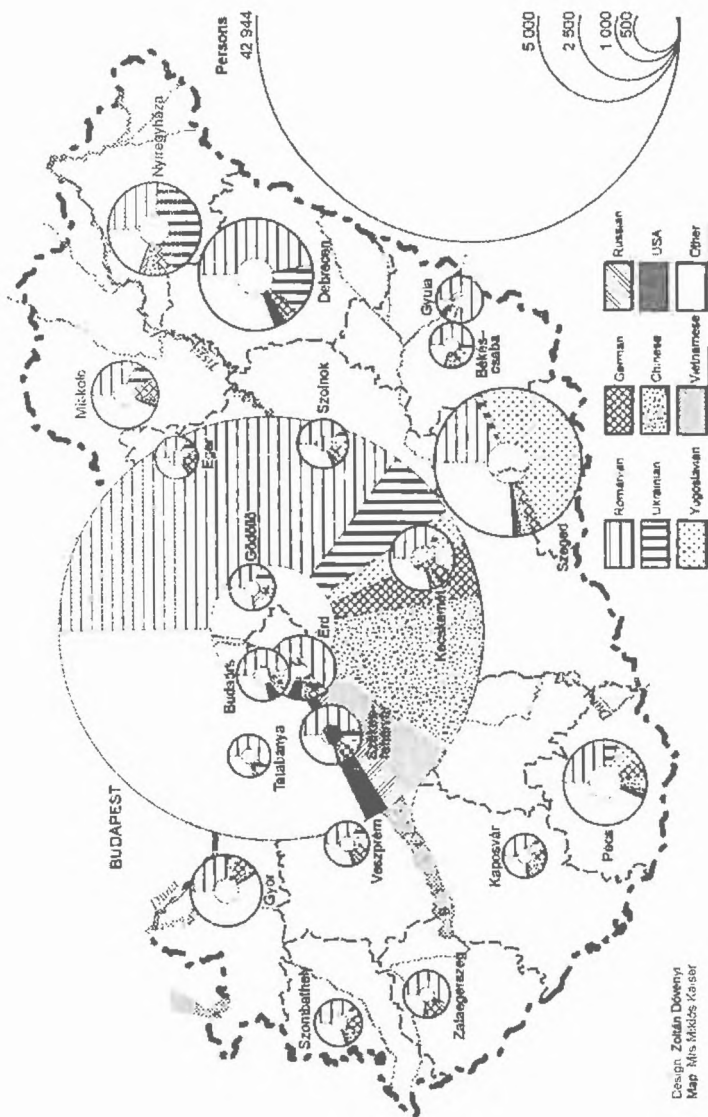
FOREIGN CITIZENS LIVING IN HUNGARY REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION  
(2001)



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Fig 2.

FOREIGN CITIZENS LIVING IN HUNGARY DISTRIBUTION ACCORDING TO SETTLEMENTS (2003)

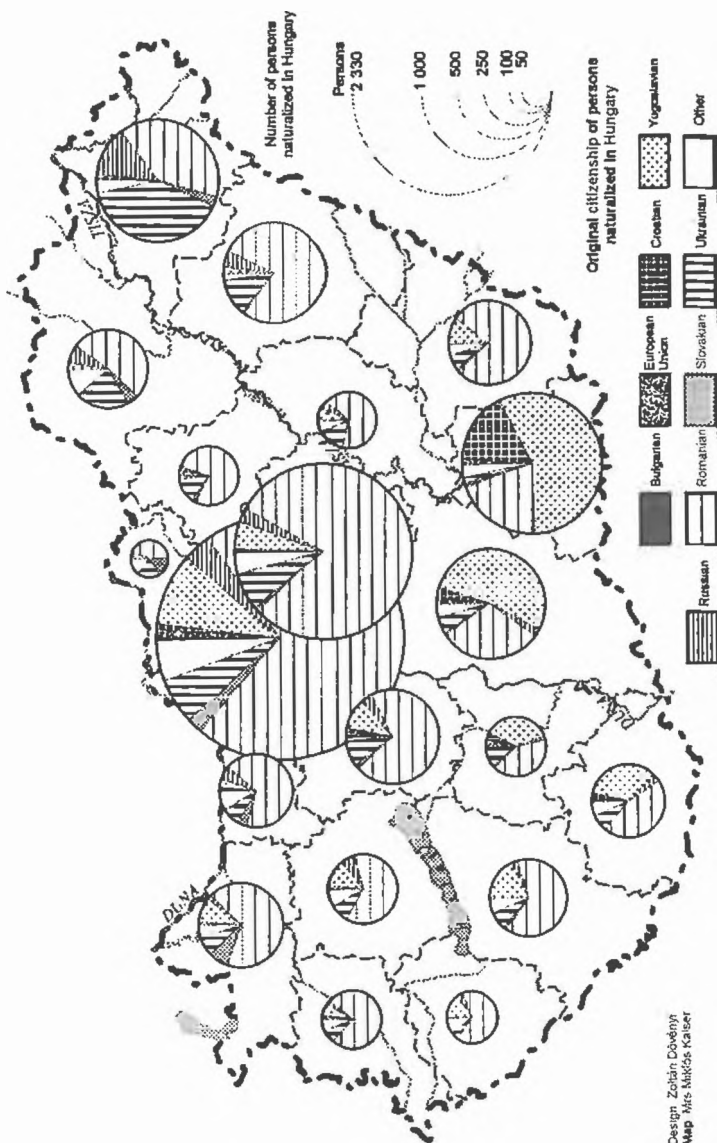


Design: Zoltán Dövényi  
Map: Mrs. Mária Kaiser

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Fig. 3

NUMBER OF NATURALISED PERSONS ACCORDING TO COUNTIES (2001)



Design: Zoltán Dóványi  
Map: Mrs. Miklós Kaiser

Fig. 4.

HUNGARY ON THE ROUTE OF EAST–WEST  
MIGRATION

