

Characteristics of Migration from Ukraine to Hungary in the Last Decade

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The article analyses the changing characteristics of migration from Ukraine to Hungary, also looking at the period before 2010, but mainly at the period between 2010 and 2022. Migration from Ukraine has undergone a number of changes during the period under study due to the socio-economic processes in Ukraine and the war that has broken out in the meantime. Of course, changes in the legal and economic characteristics of Hungary have also had an impact on migration between the two countries. In the course of the analysis, the article takes stock of the changes in legislation and social processes that have taken place and illustrates the impact of these changes on migration with statistical data, highlighting forced migration triggered by the war.

The data show that migration from Ukraine has been one of the most important factors influencing the overall migration process in Hungary.

Keywords: *migration, labour migration, asylum applications, simplified naturalisation procedure*

The topicality of the subject

The press informs us daily about the latest developments in the Russian–Ukrainian war. At the time of writing (end of November 2022), the war has been going on for almost nine months, starting with Russia’s attack on Ukraine on 24 February 2022, which some say was unexpected, while many experts have subsequently argued was predictable.

There were several signs of the start of the war, ranging from the deployment of forces near the Russian–Ukrainian border to the disruption of gas supplies from Russia to Europe, all of which could only have been signs of a military exercise, and which were intended to increase Russia’s potential for blackmail.

The war has highlighted the migration flows from Ukraine to Hungary and, in particular, their markedly changing nature since 2010. The aim of this study is to

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present the characteristics of migration flows from Ukraine and its changes between 2010 and 2022.

The main source of migration from Ukraine to Hungary

The most significant source of migration from Ukraine to Hungary is the Hungarian minority population of Transcarpathia, according to the data of the first and last Ukrainian census in 2001, 151.5 thousand persons in Transcarpathia declared themselves Hungarians – 158.7 thousand of them native Hungarians – which accounted for 96.8% of the total number of Hungarians² in Ukraine, i.e. 156.6 thousand. During the relatively peaceful period of the 2000s, the number of Hungarians in Transcarpathia decreased by about 10,000,³ while other authors estimate the decrease to be almost double, at 15–20,000,⁴ the difference between the two figures being due to the difficulty of counting migration statistics. According to data from 2017, the number of Hungarians living in Ukraine was 130,000.⁵

However, Hungarians in Ukraine are only one of the main factors of international migration from Ukraine to Hungary. It can be said, however, that Ukrainian Hungarians have been the most significant driving force behind migration between the two countries, as in their case the geographical and cultural distance was not so great as to make geographical mobility and integration difficult. Since 2010, however, there have been a number of legislative and geopolitical changes that have had an impact on this migration and have made the country an attractive destination for migrants from more distant regions of Ukraine.

The last decade has brought significant changes in the characteristics of international migration from Ukraine to Hungary.⁶ On the one hand, the size of the Ukrainian community in the latter country more than doubled in the 2010s, growing faster than in Europe as a whole (244% vs. 114%).⁷ On the other hand, together with geopolitical developments in the region and Hungarian labour market and kin-state policies, migration flows from Ukraine have undergone a significant transformation in terms of their ethnic and socio-demographic composition.⁸

² TÁTRAI et al. 2018: 5–29.

³ MOLNÁR–MOLNÁR 2005.

⁴ KARÁCSONYI–KINCSES 2010a: 31–43.

⁵ KOVÁCS–ROVÁCS 2021: 61–83.

⁶ MALYNOVSKA 2020: 169–186.

⁷ Based on United Nations 2020.

⁸ GÖDRI–CSÁNYI 2020: 483–510.

Drivers of Ukrainian migration

Two groups of factors influencing migration from Ukraine can be distinguished, one of them being external events from Ukraine, which can be defined as a pull factor according to classical migration theory. The other factor can be classified as a push factor, which typically takes the form of some type of socio-economic factor, such as a political change or a war event.

In 2010, the Hungarian Parliament amended Act LV of 1993 on Hungarian Citizenship,⁹ introducing the possibility of simplified naturalisation, and the geopolitical events since the end of 2013, first the political-social changes related to Euromaidan, and then in 2014 the annexation of Crimea to Russia, the war in Eastern Ukraine and the related economic downturn, have had a significant impact on international migration from Ukraine.

Even before the events of Euromaidan, Ukraine's economic performance had not reached its pre-1991 level, stagnating at 60–65%¹⁰ in 2014, and Ukraine is the second poorest country in Europe after Moldova in terms of GDP per capita.¹¹ Ukraine's western neighbours have also become the main destination countries for emigration, as social and cultural capital and the economic benefits derived from it play a more important role in Ukrainians' migration decisions than individual profit maximisation.¹²

However, the situation of the Hungarian minority community in Transcarpathia is positively influenced by the fact that, as a result of economic support from Hungary, the Hungarians living there are the only Hungarian community abroad where mixed marriages result in Hungarian assimilation gains.¹³

For Ukraine, the pull factor is the change in the structure and performance of the Hungarian economy between 2013 and 2021. During this period, the Hungarian labour market showed signs of the labour shortage typical of Western European countries and to counteract this, the government first allowed the preferential employment of nationals of neighbouring countries in certain shortage occupations, and later extended this possibility to other third-country nationals [according to Article 15 (1) 26 of Government Decree 445/2013 (28.11.), the occupations in which third-country nationals may be employed without a permit were defined].¹⁴

In the early 2020s, however, migration processes turned upside down. Covid-19 resulted in a negative migration balance in the migration flows of Ukrainians (for the first time since migration flows have been measured in Hungary). Although the second year of the Covid-19 showed signs of a recovery of the pre-

⁹ Act LV of 1993 on Hungarian Citizenship (<https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=99300055.tv>).

¹⁰ KINCSES 2020.

¹¹ The World Bank 2022.

¹² KINCSES 2020.

¹³ KOVÁCS–ROVÁCS 2021: 61–83.

¹⁴ Hungarian Gazette (Hivatalos Értesítő 2016/30).

plague migration patterns, the Russian–Ukrainian war brought a different level of uncertainty about the future of the migration system.

Characteristics of Ukrainian migration processes before 2010

In order to understand the processes in more detail, it is necessary to briefly review the migration processes before 2010.

Apart from geographical proximity, Transcarpathia is undoubtedly the most important source area for migration from Ukraine to Hungary, also for linguistic-ethnic reasons. The migration balance of Carpathians became negative already after the regime change, with around 2.5 thousand more people leaving the county each year than arriving.¹⁵

Between 2008 and 2015, according to the Ukrainian Statistical Office, the population of Carpathians decreased by about 9,100 people, which is largely due to the negative migration balance,¹⁶ making Transcarpathia the region with the worst migration balance in Ukraine. International migration for Ukraine is mainly emigration, international immigration is not significant, only the level of migration from CIS countries is significant.

However, there were also significant differences between districts within Transcarpathia in terms of administrative units. The balance of international migration was negative for all cities and districts, with only the district of Nagyberezna having a migration balance of 0‰. It was characteristic that a higher proportion of emigrants moved abroad from the Hungarian-populated lowland settlements. In 2015, 60% of emigrants from Berehove and Berehove district moved abroad, while 45% from Uzhhorod and Oghivske district moved abroad.¹⁷

Emigration is mainly concentrated in counties populated by Hungarians, so it can be concluded that Hungarians are moving abroad, mainly to Hungary, at a higher than average rate. Historical data show that slightly more than 84% of emigrants to Hungary were of Hungarian nationality. According to data from 2003, 22% of emigrants to non-CIS countries were Hungarians, and in 2005 and 2007, 31% and 35% of emigrants respectively were Hungarian.¹⁸

The western oblasts of Ukraine have relatively favourable demographic characteristics within Ukraine; it is the most favourable county in Ukraine in terms of the age composition of the population, the dependency ratio¹⁹ and the ageing index.²⁰ The 2001 census data also highlight the relative youthfulness of

¹⁵ TÁTRAI et al. 2018: 5–29.

¹⁶ State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 2016 (www.ukrstat.gov.ua).

¹⁷ TÁTRAI et al. 2018: 5–29.

¹⁸ TÁTRAI et al. 2018: 5–29.

¹⁹ Old age population and young age population/active age population.

²⁰ Old age population/young age population.

Transcarpathia.²¹ The youthful population composition also means that a mobile population was available, which could leave its place of residence to study or work abroad in order to achieve its goals.

Since the 1990s, seasonal emigration has been even more widespread than migration, a type of emigration that was already common in the Soviet era, with masses of people from the labour-surplus areas of the Maramures districts leaving in the summer for Russia and eastern Ukraine, where they found work in agriculture and construction. Following the break-up of the Soviet Union, the loss of jobs led to an increasing number of Ukrainian citizens looking for work abroad.

Neighbouring countries, including the Czech Republic and Hungary, were popular destinations for Ukrainian migrant workers in the 1990s. The economic boom in the early 2000s saw many people find jobs in Ukraine and Russia, but deteriorating relations with Russia and economic difficulties have led to a return to Western and Eastern European countries as the main destinations for Ukrainian emigrants by the early 2010s.

Part of the labour migration can be classified as illegal migration, which of course cannot be monitored by statistics.

Estimates show that in the early 2000s, the number of guest workers from Transcarpathia was around 100,000, while in the early 2010s the number of people from Transcarpathia who were working abroad was estimated to be between 125,000 and 250,000.²²

The number of Ukrainian workers working in Hungary can be assumed to be better reflected in Hungarian statistics after the entry into force of the NGM²³ decree in 2016, which allowed them to work under preferential conditions. The facilitation of their employment in Hungary also meant that their employment became documented, as they have no interest in concealing their residence and employment.

Three determinants of Ukrainian migration to Hungary

The introduction of simplified naturalisation, the facilitation of their access to employment and the war in Ukraine were the main factors influencing migration from Ukraine to Hungary during the period under review. In the following, I will take stock of these phenomena and illustrate the impact of these factors on the migration of Ukrainians with statistical data.

²¹ KARÁCSONYI–KINCSES 2010b: 334–349.

²² KARÁCSONYI–KINCSES 2010b: 334–349.

²³ Ministry of National Economy.

The impact of the introduction of preferential naturalisation on Ukrainian–Hungarian migration

The migration flows from Ukraine to Hungary were significantly influenced by Act LV of 1993 on Hungarian Citizenship, which allowed for preferential naturalisation in its amended § 4. In principle, Hungarian citizenship can be acquired by birth or later, after birth, by naturalisation. Act XLIV of 2010 introduced significant changes in the regulation of the acquisition of Hungarian citizenship. Under the Act, Hungarian citizenship can be acquired by naturalisation or by re-naturalisation. Naturalised persons are those who acquired Hungarian citizenship when they were born as foreign citizens, and recon naturalised persons are those whose former Hungarian citizenship has been terminated and who have become Hungarian citizens again.

The preferential naturalisation procedure introduced under the Act from 1 January 2011 allows foreign citizens with Hungarian ancestry to acquire Hungarian citizenship without having to establish Hungarian residence. The legislative changes have also facilitated the naturalisation of some foreigners living in Hungary. In the migration statistics, two types of flows of naturalised persons are reported according to the place of naturalisation:

1. those naturalised in Hungary in the given year, received their Hungarian citizenship in Hungary and have a Hungarian address, or
2. naturalised immigrants acquired their Hungarian citizenship abroad and subsequently migrated to Hungary in the given year (only the latter group can be considered border crossers, i.e. international migrants, provided that the criterion of having established a habitual residence is also met)

The number of immigrant foreign citizens naturalised abroad was low throughout the 2000s, and after the introduction of preferential naturalisation, the vast majority of foreign-born immigrant Hungarian citizens were those who moved to Hungary after acquiring citizenship abroad.²⁴

In the year following the amendment of the legislation, the number of immigrant Hungarian citizens born in Ukraine was around 1,000, peaking in 2015, when just over 9,000 people immigrated to Hungary through this route, with the number of naturalised Hungarian citizens reaching around 2,000 in 2021. Of course, the number of naturalised persons born in Ukraine but living in Hungary has also been steadily increasing, from 25,000 on 1 January 2012 to around 68,000 in 2022.²⁵ Hungarian citizens born in Ukraine (as well as in the Soviet Union) and Ukrainian citizens together are referred to as the Ukrainian-bound population.

²⁴ GÖDRI–HORVÁTH 2021: 227–250.

²⁵ Stock data.

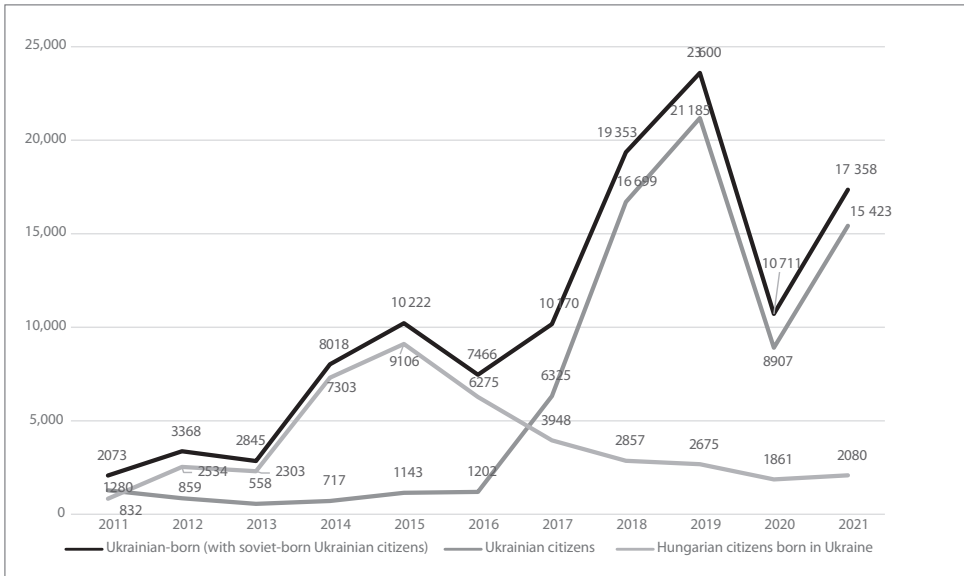


Figure 1: Ukrainian (with Soviet-born) and Hungarian citizens emigrating from Ukraine to Hungary

Source: Compiled by the author based on the Demographic Tabulation Application of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO).

Factors affecting migration: Employment situation in Hungary

For the first time this summer (2022), the number of people in employment exceeded 4.7 million for two consecutive months (June and July), the highest level since the change of regime in 1990. The employment rate was 74.6%²⁶ in the third quarter of 2022, according to the Central Statistical Office (HCSO). In around half of the economic sectors, the number of jobs decreased compared to the pre-epidemic period, with growth mainly in the service sector.

According to the latest Labour Force Survey data (HCSO Q3 2022), domestic unemployment has fallen again to a record low of 3.6%,²⁷ implying an increased depletion of labour reserves. The domestic labour market has become tighter following the epidemic, with competition for labour between firms intensifying again.

²⁶ KSH 2022.

²⁷ KSH 2022.

The labour shortage rate as a share of employment has risen from 1.5% to 2.5% in the competitive sector at the level of the economy. Signs of labour shortages in the Hungarian economy started to emerge after 2015 and the Hungarian Government has taken measures to alleviate them, first by significantly easing the rules for nationals of neighbouring countries to work in Hungary.

Employment of Ukrainian citizens in Hungary

A significant change in the employment of Ukrainian citizens in Hungary and thus in their residence in Hungary occurred in 2016 (see: legislation regulating the employment of foreign nationals²⁸), when, in order to alleviate the labour shortage in Hungary, the Ministry for National Economy issued a Notice²⁹ simplifying the rules for the employment of third-country nationals from neighbouring countries by defining the scope of professions that may be exempted from the permit requirement under Article 15 (1) 26 of the HKR.

The scope of the professions defined at that time has been extended since then, so that the 93 professions defined in 2016 have been extended to 128 professions in 2019. This amendment of the Regulation has had a pull factor effect on Ukrainian workers, as their numbers in our country have visibly multiplied in statistics since 2017. The labour absorption power of the economy as a pull factor and the difficult economic and social situation in Ukraine as a push factor have been simultaneously present, thus inducing a significant number of Ukrainian citizens to immigrate to Hungary.

Due to the emergency situation related to the Covid-19 pandemic, a number of laws had to be applied differently from the non-emergency legal regime: from September 2021, qualified employers could employ nationals of countries specified by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade in shortage occupations specified by the Minister without portfolio.

²⁸ Act IV of 1991 on Job Assistance and Unemployment Benefits (<https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=99100004.tv>); Act II of 2007 on Entry and Stay of Third-Country Nationals (<https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a0700002.tv>); Government Decree 114/2007 (V.24.) on the Implementation of Act II of 2007 (<https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a0700114.kor>); Government Decree 355/2007 (XII.23.) on the Transitional Rules Applied by Hungary to Persons Enjoying the Right of Free Movement and Residence in Connection with the Free Movement of Labour (<https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a0700355.kor>); Government Decree 445/2013 (XI.28.) on the Authorisation of the Employment of Third-Country Nationals in Hungary on the Basis of a Non-Aggregated Application Procedure (<https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a1300445.kor>); Government Decree 226/2022 (VI.28.) on the Registration and Activity of Qualified Labour Force Hiring Agencies (<https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a2200226.kor>).

²⁹ Notice of the Ministry of National Economy (https://net.jogtar.hu/getpdf?docid=A16K0302.NGM&targetdate=ffffff4&printTitle=NGM+k%C3%B6zlem%C3%A9ny&referer=http%3A//net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy_doc.cgi%3Fdocid%3D00000001.TXT).

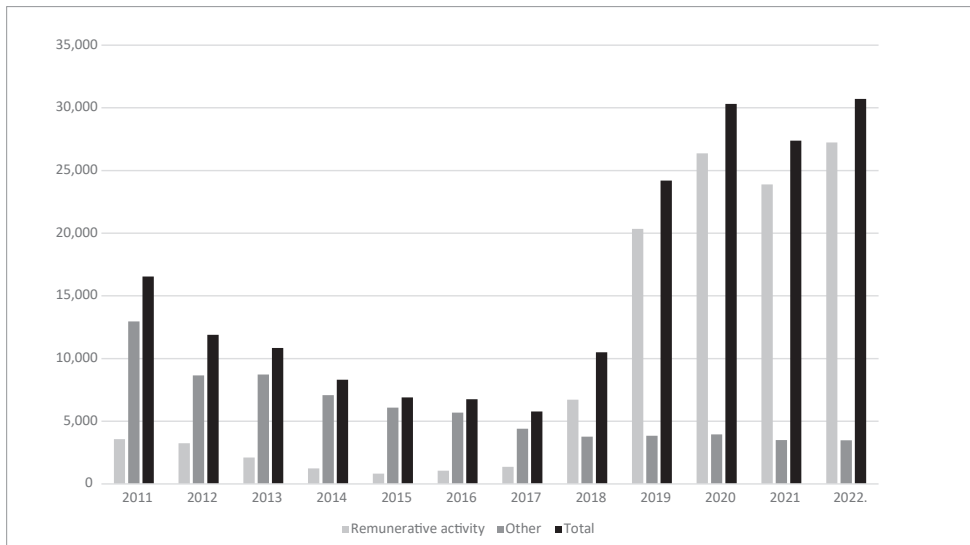


Figure 2: Ukrainian citizens residing in Hungary by purpose of arrival 2011–2022

Source: Compiled by the author based on the Demographic Tabulation Application of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO).

As the Covid-19 emergency ended on 1 June 2022, it had to be determined which rules would apply to the subsequent legal relationships: the normal or the emergency regime. The legislator transferred several of the exceptional measures to the normal regulatory environment, for example, the relaxation of the permit-free employment of temporary agency workers who are third-country nationals was maintained.

The amendment of Act IV of 1991 on the Promotion of Employment and Unemployment Benefits, which entered into force on 1 June 2022, introduced some relief (or transposed existing special arrangements) in this area, in particular by allowing the Government to grant by decree an exemption from the work permit requirement in case of employment by qualified loan providers (see HCR).

Currently, two separate Communications of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade list the occupations and countries for which a work permit is not required when the worker is employed by a qualified workforce hiring agency.

The number of workers of non-Hungarian nationality, including Ukrainian nationals, has visibly increased in the statistics after 2016. In 2022, the number of Ukrainian citizens residing in the country for employment purposes is nine times higher than in 2011, increasing from 3,500 to 27,000 in the period in question. A particularly significant increase can be observed in 2017 and 2018.

The impact of the war in Ukraine on migration flows

Since the outbreak of the Russian–Ukrainian war, migration experts are no longer in a position to develop sound theories on the Hungarian–Ukrainian migration system. Although sporadic statistical data on related issues such as daily border crossings and the number of applications for temporary protection in Hungary are available, they are often contradictory and lack the depth necessary to draw more far-reaching conclusions.

Figure 4 shows daily border crossings from Ukraine based on the Hungarian Police border traffic statistics. From 24 February to 2 November, there were a total of 3.2 million border crossings from Ukraine, 1.7 million across the Ukrainian–Hungarian border and 1.5 million across Romania. After the very high numbers in the first weeks of the war (peak of 33.6 thousand crossings on 11 March), the number of daily entries stabilised at around 10 thousand.

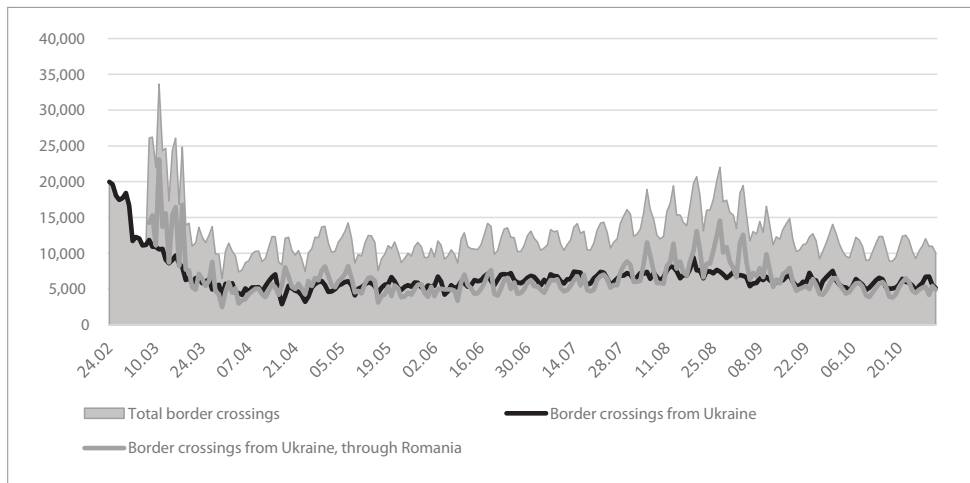


Figure 3: Number of border crossings from Ukraine to Hungary February 2022 – November 2022

Source: Compiled by the author based on daily statistics www.police.hu/

It is important to note that these figures do not represent persons but border crossings, without reference to nationality. Furthermore, there is no information available on those leaving Hungary or returning to Ukraine, i.e. there is no evidence available to make any judgements about how many of those fleeing the war actually remain in Hungary.

People arriving in Hungary from Ukraine have several options for staying. Hungarian citizens from Ukraine may enter and reside in Hungary without restrictions (but are excluded from temporary protection). Data on persons who

establish usual residence (registered address) in Hungary is collected by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO).

Ukrainian citizens holding a valid biometric travel document may stay in the country for up to 90 days, but no public data are – and will not be – available on them. Third-country nationals may also apply for a valid residence permit for short or long stays.

Another option for non-Hungarian nationals coming from Ukraine is to apply for temporary protection, which allows for stays of up to 12 months, but can be extended, and provides benefits for protected persons. Sporadic data on applications and decisions on temporary protection are already published by the National Directorate-General for Aliens Policing (NDGAP), Eurostat and UNHCR.

By the end of November, around 32,000 persons had applied for temporary protection, the vast majority of whom had already been granted temporary protection status. The number of applications for temporary protection was at its peak at the beginning of the conflict and has been on a steady downward trend, with monthly applications reaching around 1,000 since the summer of 2022. It is assumed that some of the asylum seekers are no longer in Hungary – some may have emigrated back to Ukraine or sought protection in another EU Member State – or at least the duration of their stay in Hungary cannot be clearly established.

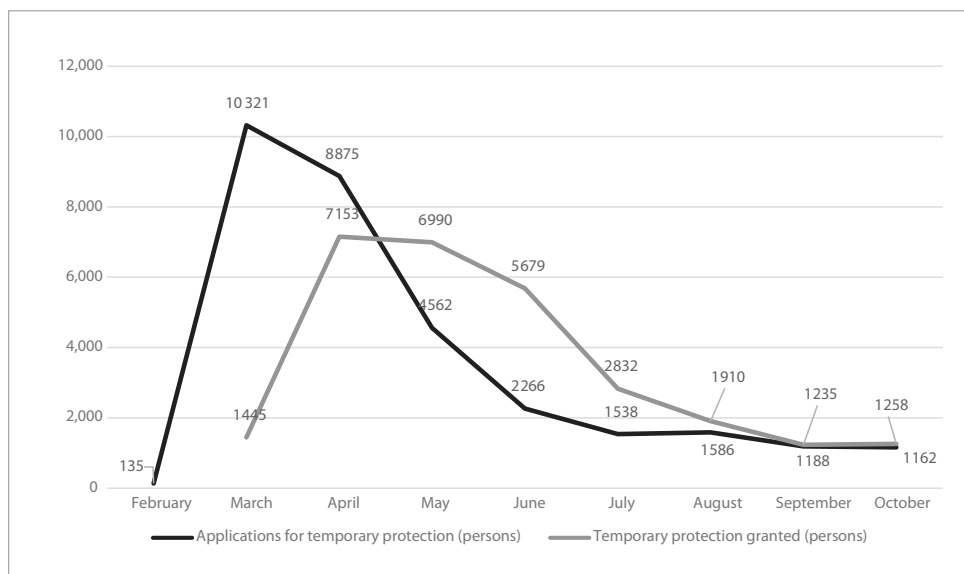


Figure 4: Number of applications for temporary protection and persons granted temporary protection February 2022 – October 2022

Source: Compiled by the author based on the Demographic Tabulation Application of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO).

Summary

The year 2020 is a clear break in the migration flows trend between Ukraine and Hungary. The Hungarian Government's policy of increasing labour migration in the second half of the previous decade and the introduction of simplified naturalisation on the Hungarian side were of similar importance, further stimulating migration between the two countries.

Subsequently, the Russian–Ukrainian war that broke out in 2022 had a significant impact on further migration flows to Ukraine. The impact of the war in Ukraine is still highly uncertain. On the one hand, the low number of applications for temporary protection (only 1% of daily border crossings) suggests that few Ukrainians wish to stay in Hungary for a longer period. On the other hand, however, the relevant data needed to draw firm conclusions on this issue are not yet available, or are incomplete in terms of quality, timeliness and depth.

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