

# **Migration Narratives in Europe**

## ***A Social Media Intelligence Study***

*Country report for Hungary*



**A Bakamo Public**  **Project for the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung**

**- 2019 -**

# Context to the Hungarian Discussion on Migration



- Hungary has been the **member of the European Union since 2004**. In 2015 the country's population was 9,855,571.
- The presence of refugees grew dramatically in Hungary in **2015. Asylum applications rose to 177,135**, which was ten times of the 2013 rate. However, **applications plunged by 2017, and in the same year asylum seekers made up only 0.04% of the population, which is among the lowest in the EU**.\*
- Public social media conversation in Hungary around migration in one year consists of ~385,100 posts. Compared to population size, **the conversation on migration in Hungary is the 13<sup>th</sup> biggest in the EU**.
- Hungary is lead by a right-wing populist government and prime minister **Viktor Orbán**. The ruling Fidesz-Christian Democrat coalition owns two-thirds of the parliament seats which leaves no tools for the opposition in parliamentary votes.
- Migration has been a top issue in Hungary since the appearance of refugees near Keleti railway station in Budapest in 2015. **The Hungarian government follows a strong anti-immigrant agenda** ever since, and objects the EU quota system in the name of national sovereignty.



\*Source: [europarl.europa.eu](http://europarl.europa.eu)



## Introduction | HU

# Threat of Migration Influenced Elections

During the summer and fall of 2015 more than 170,000 refugees marched through Hungary in search for asylum in Europe. Although this was the only occasion when migration appeared in close proximity of Hungarians, the threat has been kept on agenda by the right-wing Fidesz government further through the 2018 election campaign. Fidesz framed the migration crisis as an imminent danger for Hungary, and in a wider context, for Europe.

The government has been widely successful to maintain the buzz around migration, and it has also been largely effective in promoting the anti-immigrant opinion in Hungary. However, the discourse on public social media revealed a level of scepticism towards the government propaganda in every domain of the migration discourse.

| Government's Framing  | Narrative       | Opposing Argument   |
|---|-----------------|---|
| <i>Migration is a dire security threat</i>                                | Security        | <i>Threat of migration is irrelevant, stop wasting tax money on it</i>          |
| <i>Migrants do not deserve help</i>                                       | Humanitarianism | <i>The necessity of help is invisible</i>                                       |
| <i>If we don't protect it, Hungary will become a 'land of immigrants'</i> | Identity        | <i>Hungary's first Winter Olympics gold medal won by two Chinese-Hungarians</i> |
| <i>Zero-sum-game against the Hungarian poor</i>                           | Economy         | <i>The government is capitalizing on the Investment Immigration Program</i>     |
| <i>More Hungarian babies instead of migrants</i>                          | Demographics    | <i>Exodus of high-skilled workers</i>   |

**2015: migrants at the Keleti train station in Budapest**



**2018 election: migration as the key security threat for Hungary**

All images represented in this report appeared as attachments to posts on public social media platforms, and are used here as illustrations of the public online conversation.



## Key Findings | HU

# How and where do Hungarian people discuss migration in the social media space?

### Size of Pan-European Narratives

Almost 90% of the Hungarian public online conversation is dominated by the **security** threat posed by immigration. Humanitarian aspects are discussed scarcely, while the economic, cultural, and demographic aspects of migration barely appear.

### Local Issues

For years, the Hungarian government has been naming **George Soros** and **civil society** as the initiators of the migration crisis. This manufactured interest is saturated either by anti-migrant hate or the frustration over pointless arguments.

### EU & Domestic Politics

Hungarians have very little personal experience with refugees, while the government has been strategically co-opting the threat of migration to create a fear-based social environment. Thus the conversation mainly follows the **political thematization** of the issue.

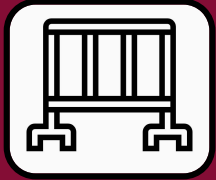
### Discussion Tone

The Hungarian conversation around migration is fuelled by **intense passion**. This can be traced back to the fearmongering pursued by many online news articles, and the consequent rage that is arising while people discuss the security threat migration poses.

### Conversation Channels

Content published on **online news sites** dominate the discussion in Hungary, with news aggregators and right-wing news conglomerates promoting the government's message.

# Pan-European Narratives in the Hungarian Context



Fear-mongering communication that dominated government owned media channels permeated the public discourse in Hungary. As a result, when people address migration, they talk about the **security threat** it poses, or the threat's actual relevance for Hungary.



Although the humanitarian aspect of migration is rarely addressed in Hungary, the discourse consists of **mainly anti-immigrant voices** that question the overall necessity of helping migrants reach or integrate in Europe.



Costs of the migration crisis are irrelevant for most Hungarians; people are more concerned about how the government secretly makes money on immigration through the **Hungarian Investment Immigration Program**.



Although cultural consequences of immigration are rarely mentioned, some people worry over **losing the local sovereignty** if Hungary turns into the “land of immigrants”. In the meantime, others express concern over the growing xenophobia in the country.



Labour market integration of refugees is barely discussed in Hungary. As the government opposes migration at this domain as well, the public points to the **exodus of high-skilled Hungarians**, unaffected by the government's family-friendly measures.



# + *Pan-European Narratives in Hungary*



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1.

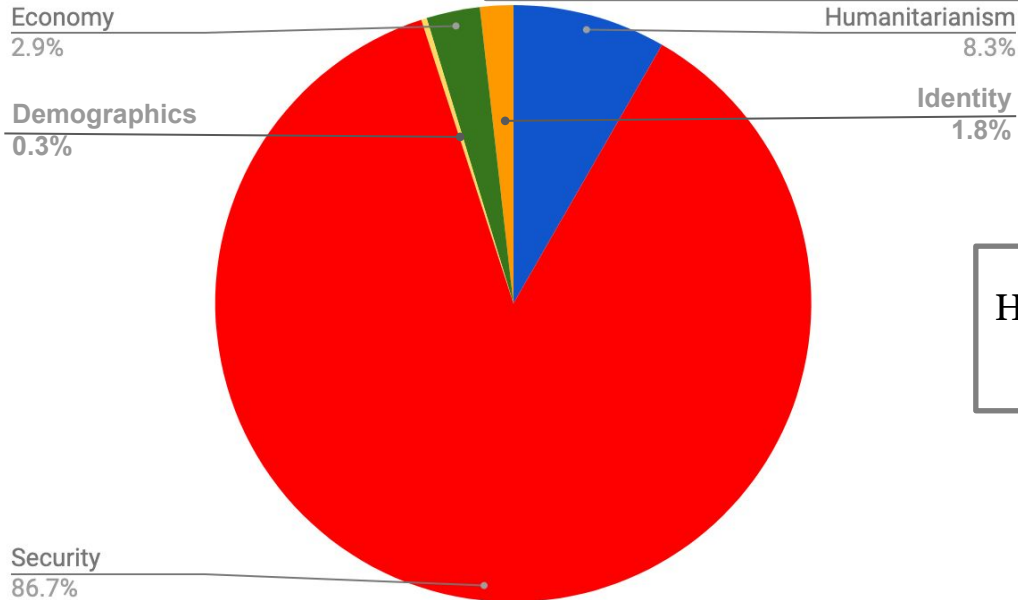


# The shape of the migration discourse

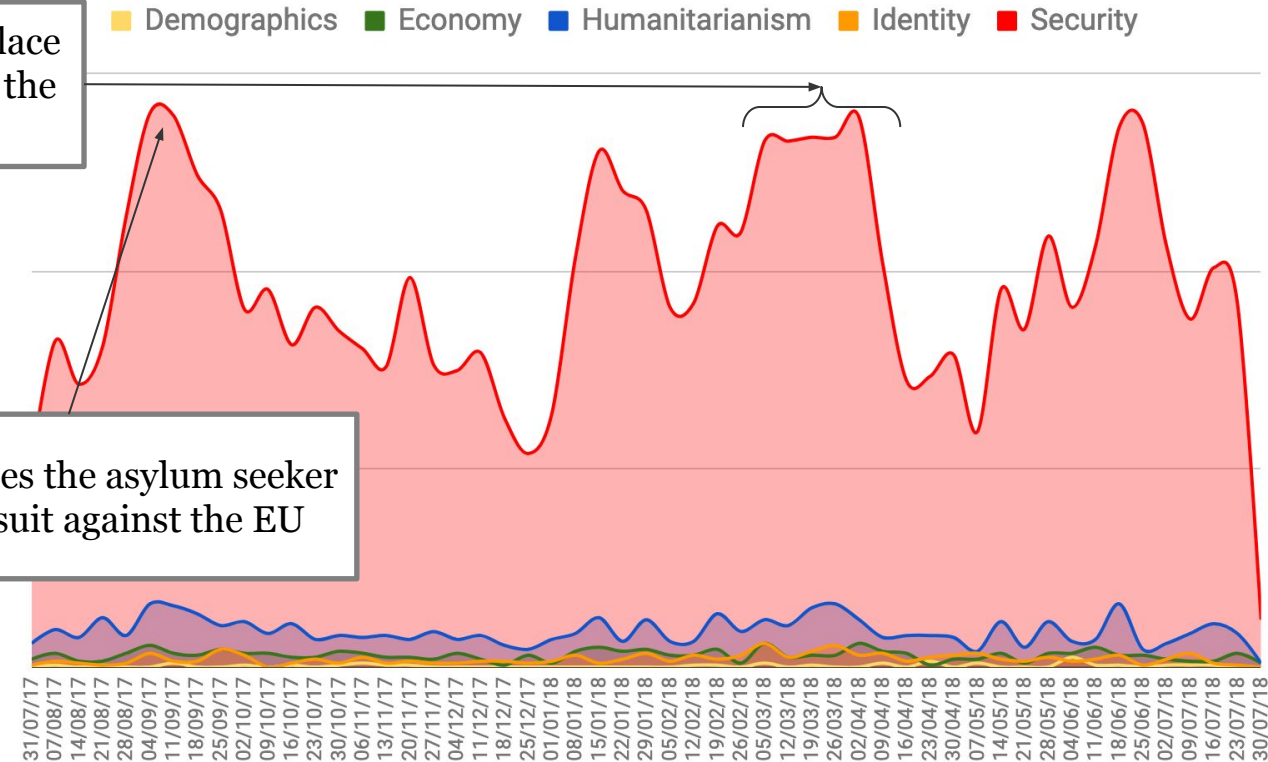
The issue of migration has been kept on the table by the government since the 2015 start of the crisis. The right-wing used the migration threat during the 2018 election campaign and argued the necessity for protective measures on every level. Consequently, the **security** aspect of migration is discussed the most, while the humanitarian angle is reflected to a much smaller extent. The demographic, economic, and cultural influences of migration are barely appear in Hungary.

**Results:**  
~385,100

Parliamentary election in Hungary took place on 8 April 2018. The migration crisis was the key focus of the campaign



Hungary loses the asylum seeker quota lawsuit against the EU

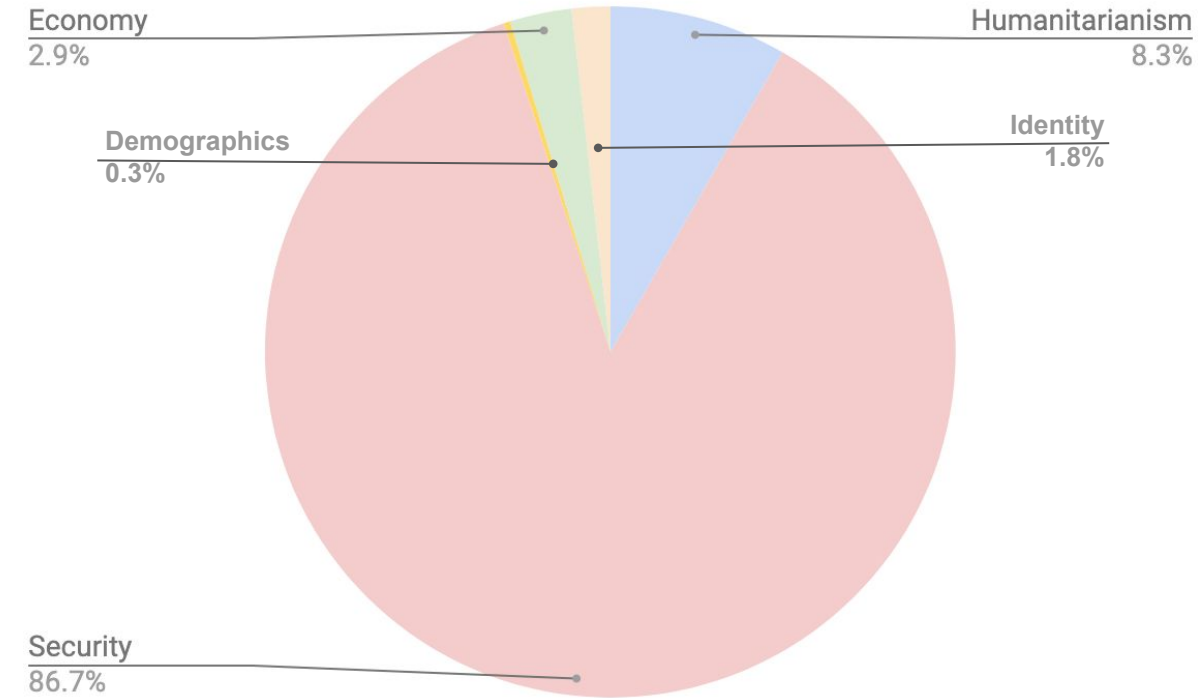


# Demographics (1): Hungarians' Emigration vs. The Threat of Immigrants



Only a handful of people go to social media to discuss migration's influence on the Hungarian labour market. The government pushes the agenda of **dealing with the demographic crisis not by welcoming more migrants, but by supporting Hungarian families** and encouraging the birth of more babies.

Opposing this narrative, some people argue the government's hypocrisy at yet another field: Hungarian families are said to be supported, while the reality is that **highly skilled Hungarian workers are emigrating en masse**, seeking better wages and a more prosperous life in countries with more stable political and economic systems.







# Pan-European Narratives | HU

## Demographics (2): Quotes

### ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Support Hungarian families to manage the demographic crisis

*“In comparison with left-wing parties, **KDNP (Christian Democratic People's Party)** believes that the current demographic problems should be solved through the support of Hungarian families, and not by the integration of refugees.”*

*“Hungary wants to manage the demographic crisis with **more Hungarian babies** and not with more migrants”*

### PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Emigration of high-skilled Hungarians is a bigger problem than the influx of migrants

*Viktor says that if Fidesz loses at the election, Hungary will be the ‘land of immigrants’. Well, **if they win, we will be the ‘land of emigrants’.**”*

*The streets are full with these billboards to fuel hate against refugees coming to Hungary. In the meantime, **the prime minister does not even have a word for the flow of high-skilled people who are leaving the country. Anybody who has the chance goes abroad for higher wages** and a more predictable life. Without the intention of ever coming back to Hungary.*

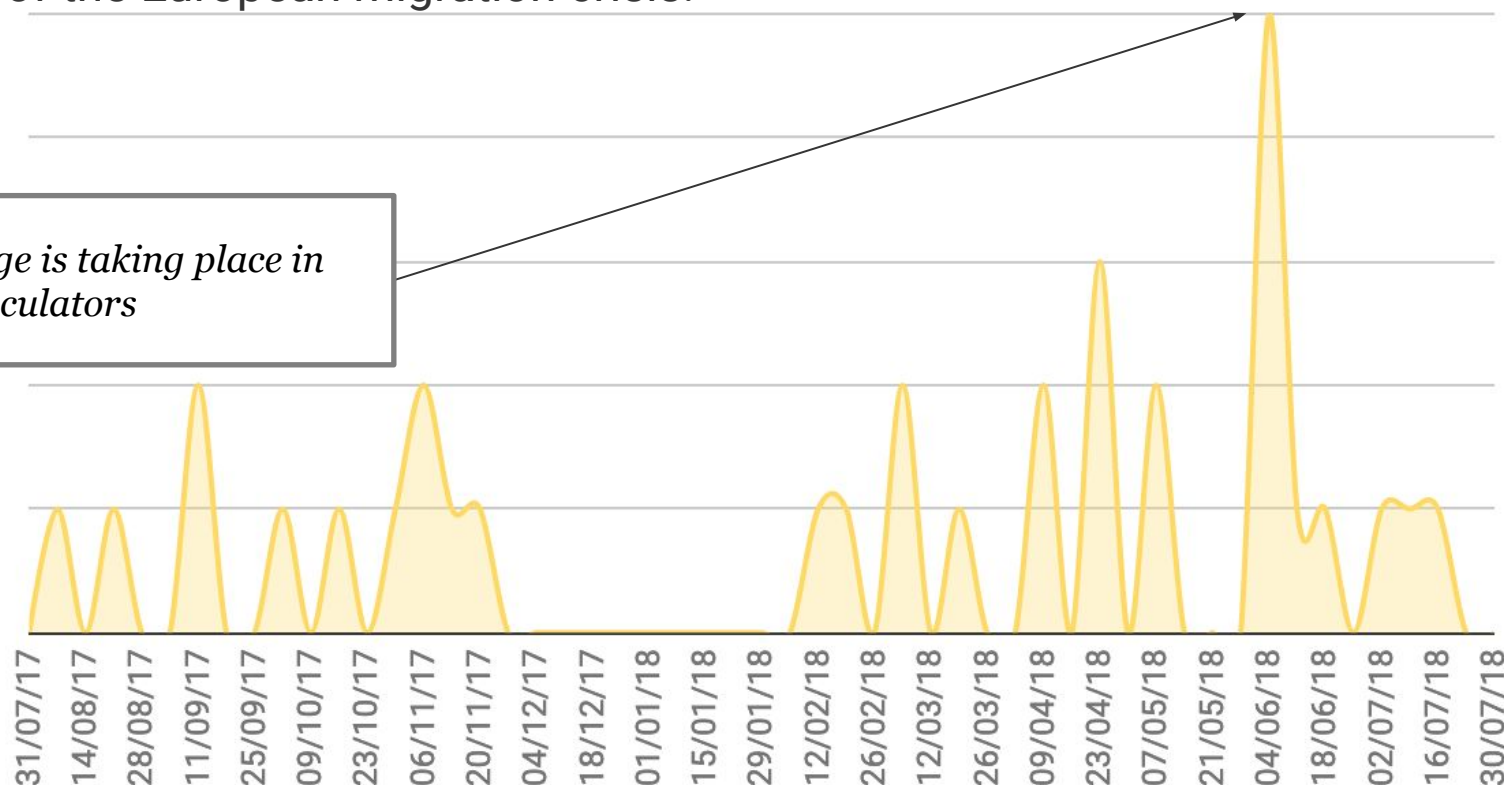
# Pan-European Narratives | HU

## Demographics (3): Top Stories

The discussion on the demographic aspects of migration is mainly driven by the government's agenda to strengthen the conspiracy on the reasons of the European migration crisis.

**Results:**  
~1,100 (0,3%)

*Orbán claims that a systemic demographic change is taking place in Europe, initiated by international speculators*



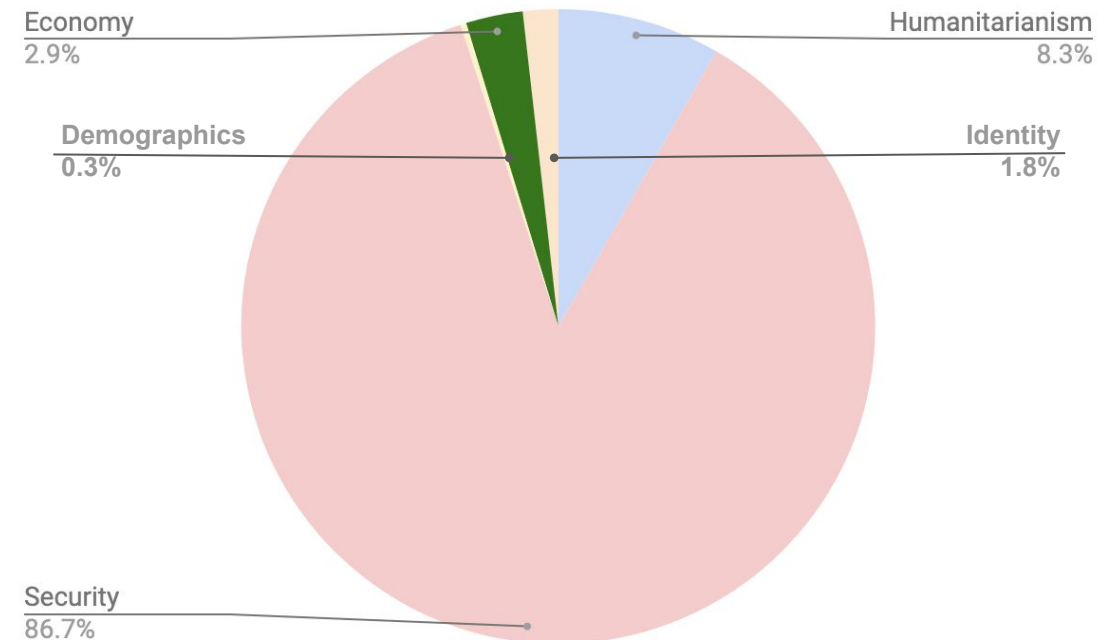
Demographics

# Economy (1): Migration's Costs Are Irrelevant, but Government Hate is Present



Although migration is a key issue in Hungary, the economic costs of welcoming refugees or keeping them away from Hungary is rarely discussed in the public online sphere. **Estimation of actual costs rarely come up**, while the anti-immigrant sentiment based on the economic zero-sum-game is mainly fuelled by politicians' statements shared by online news sites. However, these arguments fail to appear in the public social media discussions of authentic users.

What we see on the opposite side is not so much an argument for immigration, but rather the criticism of the Hungarian government. **Public outrage targets the financial hypocrisy behind the government's' tax-funded hate-mongering propaganda against migrants while in the background organisations with strong government-ties make money on issuing residence permits** for wealthy buyers of the Hungarian Investment Immigration Program.



# Pan-European Narratives | HU

## Economy (2): Quotes



### ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Europe pays way too much to manage the migration crisis

*“Deportation of migrants cost fortunes – **this will make Europe go bankrupt.**”*

Government officials argue how the Hungarian society will lose on migration

*“[At the time Minister of Human Resources] **Zoltán Balog** claims that **Hungarian Romas may lose the most if the country welcomes a large number of immigrants**, as the social benefits currently available for Roma people will have to be spent on migrants.”*

*Minister of State for Family, Youth and International Affairs Katalin Novák claims that the real stake of the parliamentary election is **whether the government will spend on Hungarian families or on migrants.***

### PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Organisations tied to the prime minister make profit on the government's Investment Immigration Program

*“**Chinese immigrants who bought into the Investment Immigration Program are having the time of their lives** in Budapest”*

*“He is afraid of migrants and fails to realize that it was **Antal Rogán's** (Minister of the Prime Minister's Cabinet Office) **friends who issued residence permits to migrants and thus made millions**”*

*“Orbán's government **wasted billions of forints from taxpayers money** on “national consultation”, referendum, and campaigns on migration, **while they were making profit on the immigration program.**”*

Government-related entities make money on fear-mongering against migrants

*“Public media's favourite expert **hates migrants on live television for 700,000 forints per month.**”*

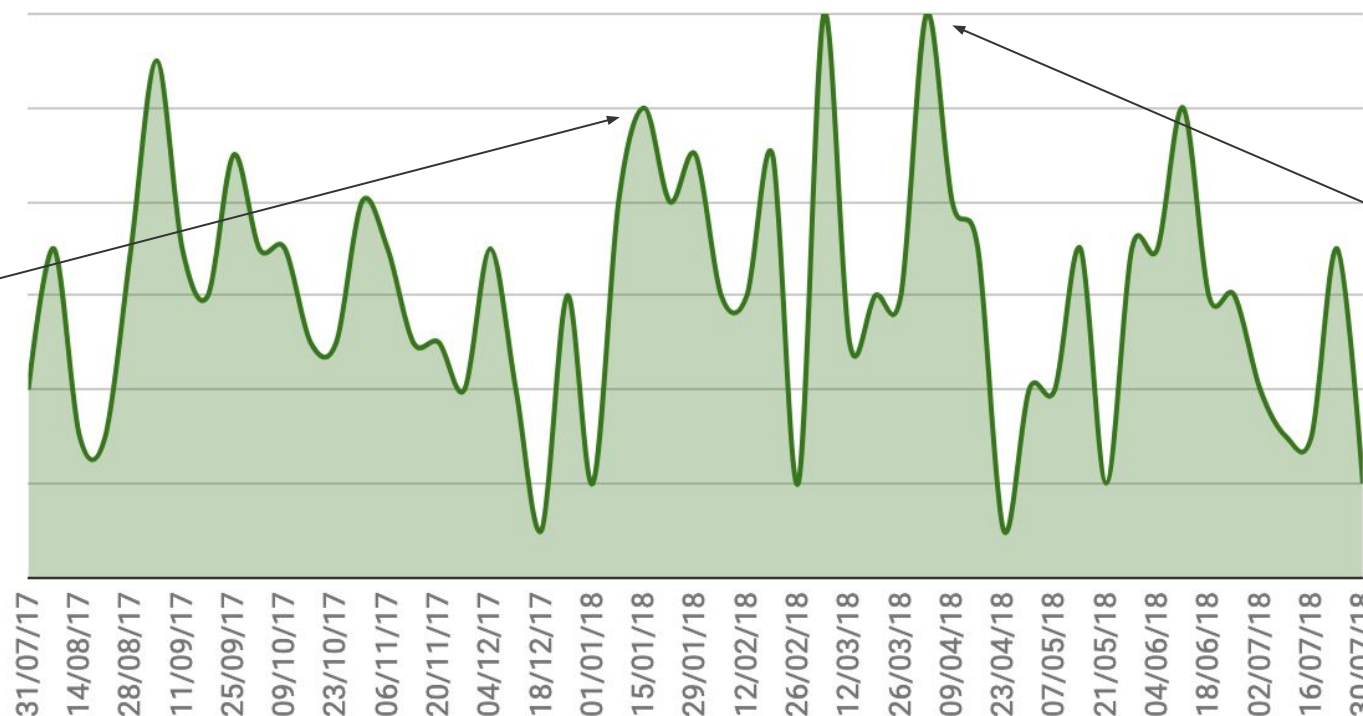
# Pan-European Narratives | HU

## Economy (3): Top Stories

The biggest interest in the economy narrative is triggered by a deeply personal comparison reflecting the superfluous nature of governmental expenditures on hate-mongering against immigrants. While the government fuels anti-immigrant sentiment even through potential economic losses, everyday people demand more financial focus to deal with pressing social issues.

**Results:**  
~11,200 (2,9%)

Minister of Human Resources Zoltán Balog claims that **Hungarian Romas may lose the most if the country welcomes migrants**



*“So don’t be surprised when your grandma dies at the corridor of a shitty-ass hospital waiting for someone to take care of her. But nobody came, because **the party you elected spent all the money on stadiums and billboards against migrants instead of developing the health care system.**”*

Economy



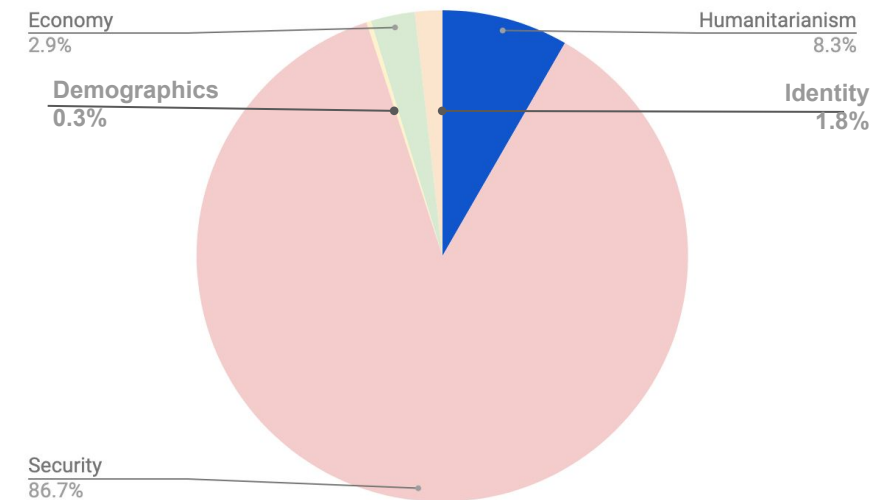


# Humanitarianism (1): Anti-migrant Sentiment Dominates Public Social Media

Public social media platforms host **mainly anti-immigrant voices** in the conversation around the humanitarian aspect of migration. In most cases, these opinions question the overall necessity of humanitarian help: people claim that migrants and refugees are two different breeds, argue that humanitarian organisations are not there to help but to destabilize Europe, and declare that humanitarian aid for immigrants is disproportionately high.

There are two key reasons behind the exclusivity of this sentiment. First, in the context of the government's full-scale anti-migrant propaganda, supporting refugees is a certain form of opposition in Hungary, and people are often afraid to go to public platforms to express their pro-immigrant views (even if it is rooted in genuine sympathy for those in need).

Second, since the actual presence of refugees is miniscule in Hungary (thus the required help is invisible), people who criticize the anti-immigrant agenda are more focused on countering the security or economic arguments than the humanitarian aspects of the debate.



# Pan-European Narratives | HU

## Humanitarianism (2): Quotes



### ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

#### Migrants are not the same as refugees

*"I think it is completely logical: **those millions of Arabs and negroes are not refugees but some sort of invaders** looking for social aid. Human traffickers made them believe that once they arrive in Europe they will be welcomed with a Mercedes and a harem of blond princesses."*

*"Even the minister claims that a **difference should be made between welcoming refugees and supporting mass immigration.**"*

#### Refugees do not deserve help, especially not to the extent they receive now

*"It is an everyday phenomena, when **immigrants cheat on the asylum evaluation process**"*

*"The UN's current proposal on migration would **provide similar social services to illegal immigrants**, which is now available to Hungarian people. This poses a threat bigger than ever"*

#### Humanitarian organisations are fake

*"Another **Soros-organization busted: they claim to rescue refugees, but in reality they are in close cooperation with the mafia** and human traffickers"*

*"Peter Imanuelsen, the Swedish journalist living in the UK and writing under the pseudonym Peter Sweden, tried to make a video footage of the docking of Aquarius and Phoenix – two rescue ships of "civil organizations" – and the landing of thousands of migrants. But **as he was making the video, police approached and demanded he deleted the file or else he has to face criminal charges**"*

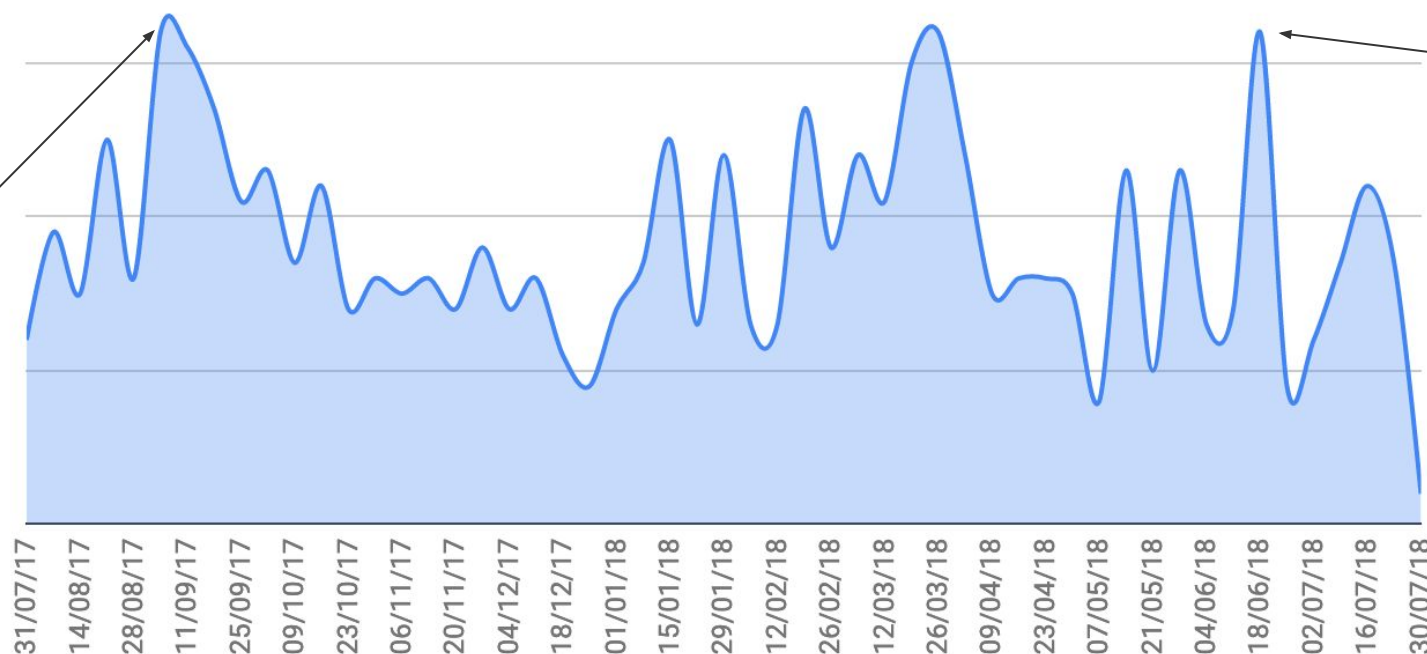
# Pan-European Narratives | HU

## Humanitarianism (3): Top Stories

Apart from a relatively steady conversation on the humanitarian aspects of migration, people show increased interest in humanitarian catastrophes around the world and the international reaction to Hungary's anti-immigrant measures.

**Results:**  
~32,100 (8,3%)

News on the Rohingya refugee crisis in Myanmar as India refuses to welcome refugees hit by the crisis



United Nations' High Commissioner for Human Rights condemns Hungary for the 'Stop Soros' bill as it derails civil organisations from foreign funding

Humanitarianism

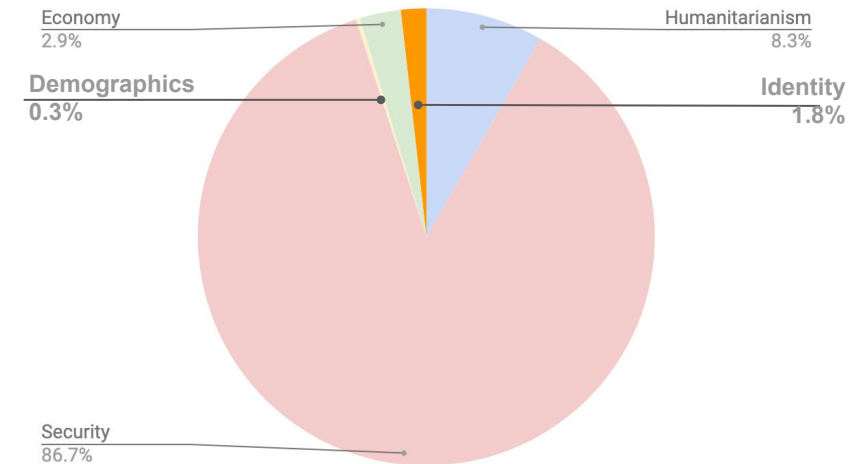


# Identity and Customs (1): Hungarian Xenophobia is a Bigger Threat Than Migration

Similarly to several other aspects of migration, the conversation is fuelled by the governments' extensive anti-immigrant campaign. An important buzzword coined by the government was the **"land of immigrants"**, which reflects the threat of multiculturalism brought to Hungary by immigrants.

Some people applaud the government for protecting the country's homogeneous identity. However, the majority of the otherwise tiny conversation on the cultural consequences of immigration, reflects the damage caused by the hate-mongering propaganda. People worry about how **the term "migrant" became a curse word even among the youngest**, and worry over the scale of the damage by pointing to the already existing xenophobia in Hungary.

Some people cite recent Winter Olympics success achieved by a team partly consisting of Chinese-Hungarian athletes as a case in point to ridicule the – otherwise sport-loving – government's attempt to denounce immigrants.





# Pan-European Narratives | HU

## Identity & Customs (2): Quotes

### ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Hungary becoming the “land of immigrants”

*#Orbán: At this election, Hungary is choosing its future: **if it is a national (Fidesz) government, then the country stays Hungarian.** Otherwise Hungary will turn into the “land of immigrants”*

Hungary stands up for its own identity in the international community by opposing migration quotas

*Finally we have our own foreign policy, which does not stop at kissing the ass of some EU bureaucrats. **We now stand up for our own interes and protect our sovereignty, especially in regards to the migration crisis.** We are not isolated – Europe will get used to it that we now have an opinion.*

### PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

‘Migrant’ is now a curse word, even in primary schools

*“**In schools, ‘Soros’ and ‘migrant’ are now common adjectives similar to ‘faggot’ or ‘gypsy’.** If someone doesn’t know the answer to the teacher’s question, then kids will shout ‘migrant!’”*

Comments on Hungarian xenophobia

*“There is a relatively small, ethnically homogenous population in the heart of Europe. Its’ individuals suffer from inferiority complex and identify with white-skinned people only. **So it is evident that now they say ‘if your skin looks different, do not even think of coming here. You can not be our friend’.**”*

Despite the central hate-mongering propaganda, Hungarians can be proud of some immigrants

*“The **first ever Winter Olympics gold medal is won for Hungary by a team that includes two sons of an immigrant family,** both born in Budapest. What a middle finger shown to the politics of the current government :D”*



# Pan-European Narratives | HU

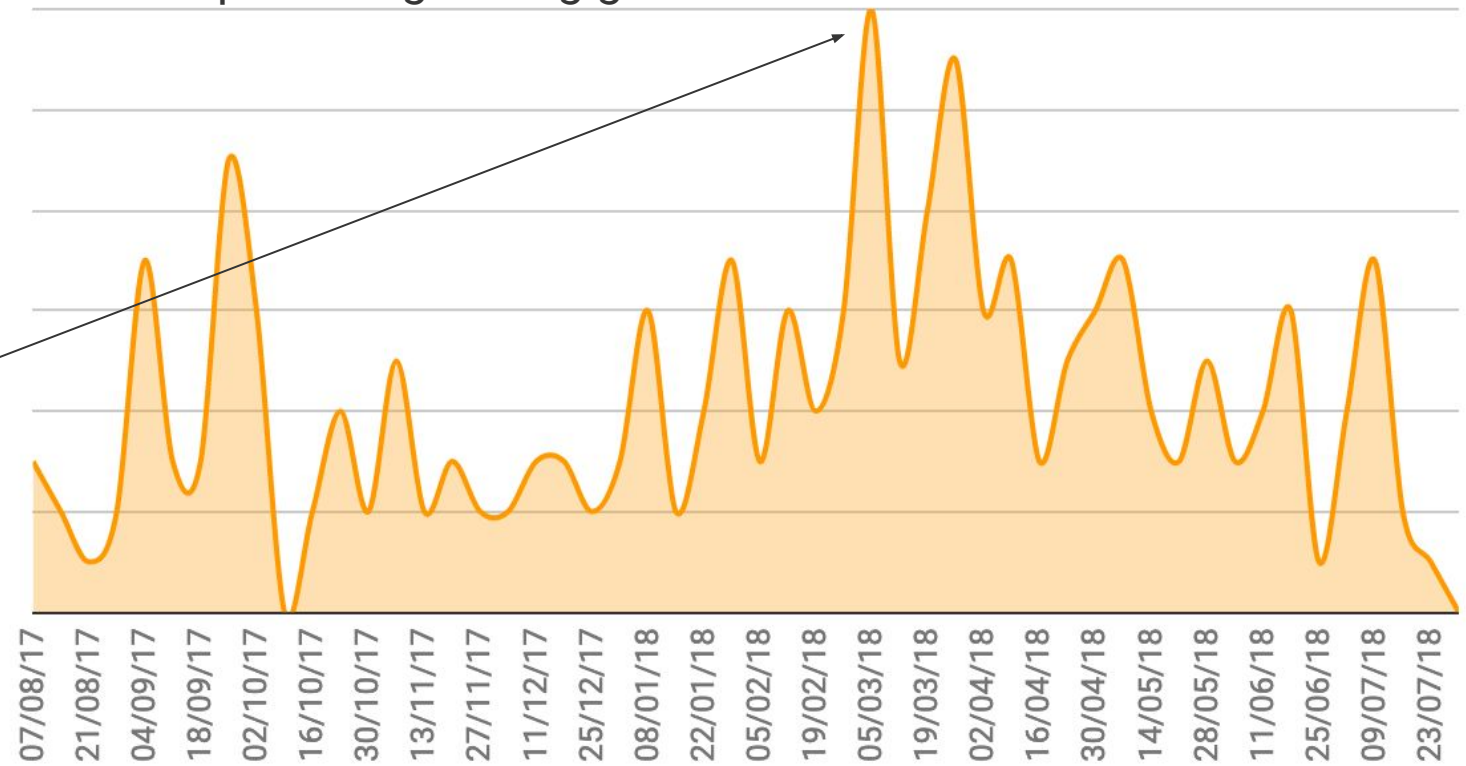
## Identity & Customs (3): Top Stories

As migration was a key topic during the general election of 2018, the conversation on the cultural influence of a potential refugee influx peaked during the weeks of the campaign. While some people discussed the threats, others were more concerned about the return of a xenophobic right-wing government.

**Results:**  
~7,000 (1,8%)

*“Go and vote, or else we’ll turn into the ‘land of immigrants’.”*

*“Orbán saves us from migrants. But who will save us from Orbán?!”*



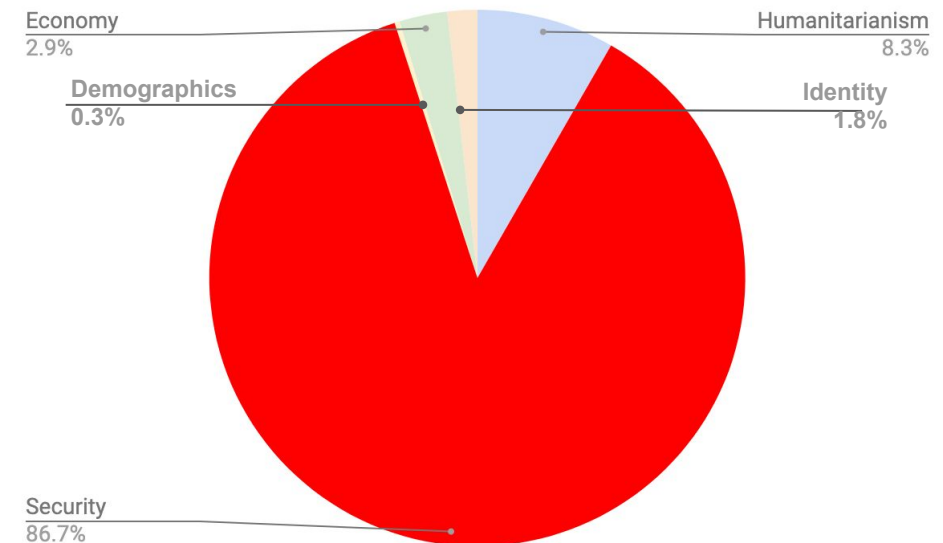
Identity



# Security (1): Crisis Situation Leveraged To Focus Citizen Attention

Since the burst of the migration crisis in 2015, the government lead by Viktor Orbán strategically maintained **fear-mongering communication against refugees, which enabled the governing party Fidesz to pose as the only entity in Hungary that is able to maintain order and protect the Hungarian people.** Central media sites and right-wing voices in social media often cite terror attacks taking place in EU member states which welcome refugees. Apart from the threat of terror, some people refer to rape cases committed by migrants, and the diseases they bring to Europe.

In the meantime, there is a substantial amount of **Hungarians who turn to public social media platforms to express their frustration over how the government frightens the country with refugees.** Voices questioning the threat posed by migrants do not argue their harmlessness, but question the size and relevance of the threat in Hungary. Many are fed up with the attention wasted on the migration crisis framed as a crucial security challenge for Hungary, while there are other, more pressing social and economic issues in the country.





# Pan-European Narratives | HU

## Security (2): Quotes

### ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

European terror attacks illustrate the fate of countries that welcome immigrants

*"Terror attacks throughout Europe are a result of an **uncontrolled migration policy**"*

Migrants would pose various forms of threats had Hungary welcome any

*"Muslim immigrants pose an extreme threat on **European women.**"*

*"Let's not forget that mass immigration holds **major health risks** for the whole population"*

Security threats of immigration leveraged during the election campaign

*Orbán says: "**Migration** is a mistake that you can make only once. You have no chance for correction. **This is the most exciting and most threatening risk of the election in April.**"*

### PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Securitization of migration is a fake problem that the government created

*(Minister of the Prime Minister's Office) Lázár says that the key question of the elections is migration. **My dear little Lázár, the only group who buys into this is your uneducated peasant voters.** Look at the comments below, who is writing all that shit?!*

Securitization of migration hijacks the attention from more pressing problems

*"Hand fighting, border protection, power, alien, migrant, fight, enemy, war. **Shouting "migrant!" is the new buzzword** instead of "utility cost reduction"*

*We need a positive, coherent worldview next to opposing corruption. But **the fear generated by the negative utopia of migration overrode the outrage of corruption.** We should be more afraid of corruption, of course, but what gets to people as news is also a question of resources.*

# Pan-European Narratives | HU

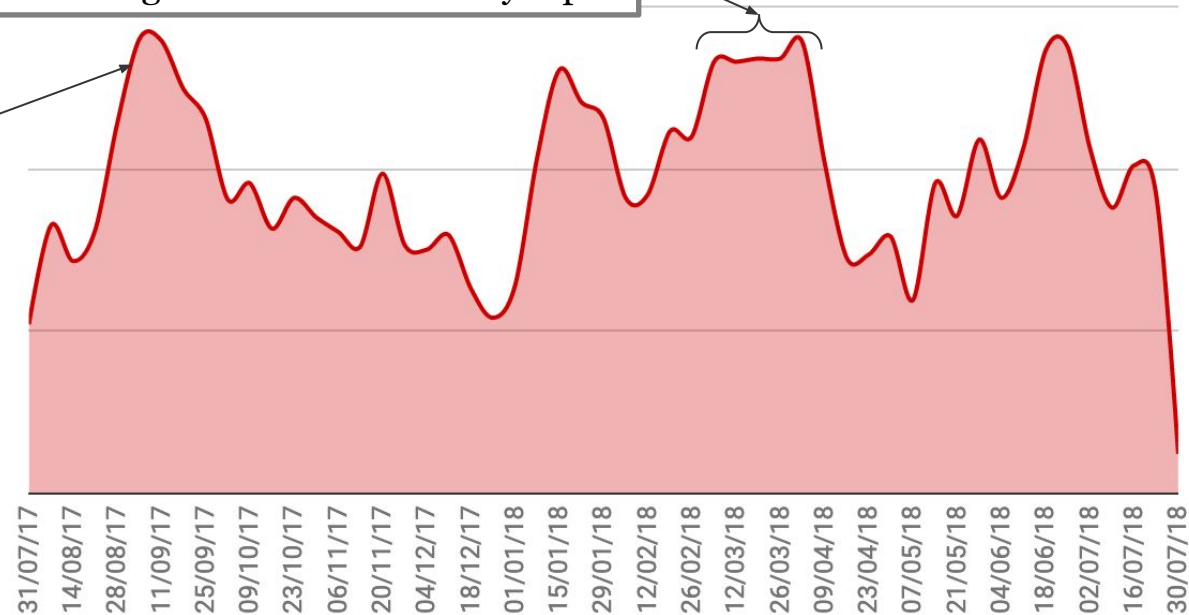
## Security (3): Top Stories

The European Court of Justice dismissed Hungary's case to object the asylum seeker quota system. This was a major sign from the EU opposing Hungary's anti-immigration stance and lack of cooperation with the EU in managing the crisis. However, during the 2018 election campaign the Hungarian government interpreted the ruling as the EU's intention to press Hungary towards welcoming migrants, which was portrayed as a major security threat for the country.

**Results:**  
~333,700 (86,6%)

**Campaign** of the 2018 Hungarian parliamentary election, in which the migration crisis was a key topic

Hungary lost the **asylum seeker quota lawsuit** against the EU



Security

# + *Local Issues in Hungary Around Migration*



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# Local Issues | HU

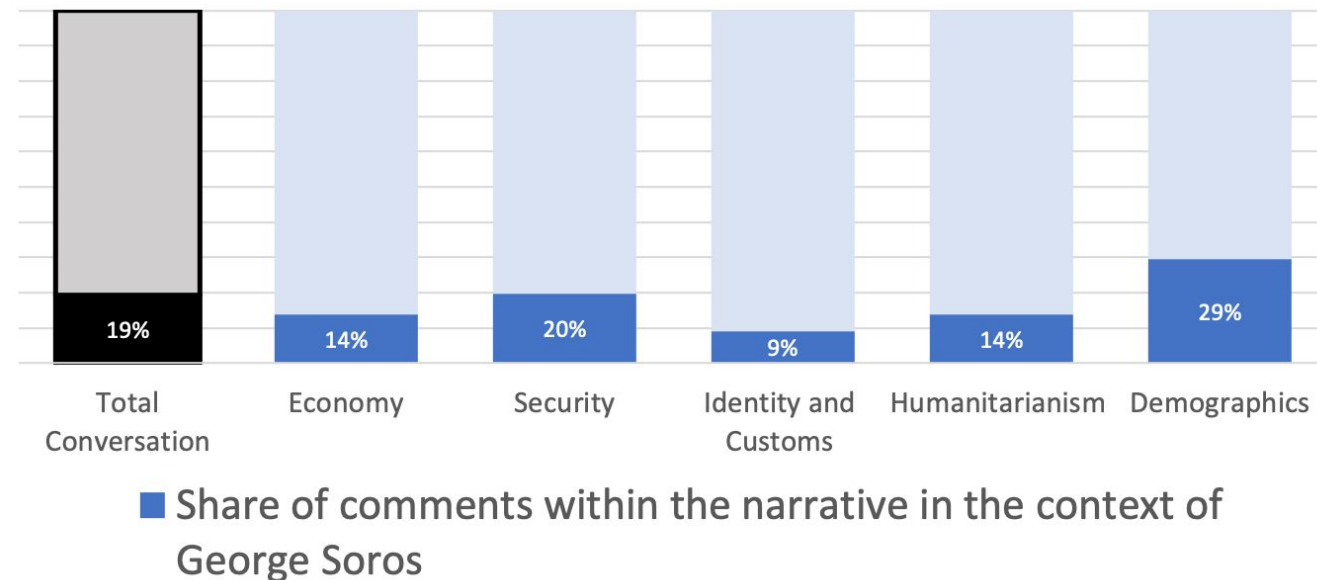
## George Soros

The Hungarian-American businessman and philanthropist George Soros have been actively supporting open society in Hungary since the fall of the iron curtain. Since 2016 the Hungarian government is conducting an extensive campaign against him in Hungary.

The campaign attacked Soros based on his article “*Rebuilding the Asylum System*”, and the Hungarian government suggested that the philanthropist’s main goal is to destroy national and European stability through the refugee crisis.

As his name was constantly kept in context, George Soros is an integral part of the migration discussion in Hungary. Although in most cases his name has no meaningful connection to the context, the assumedly systemic demographic change is often connected to him by government propaganda.

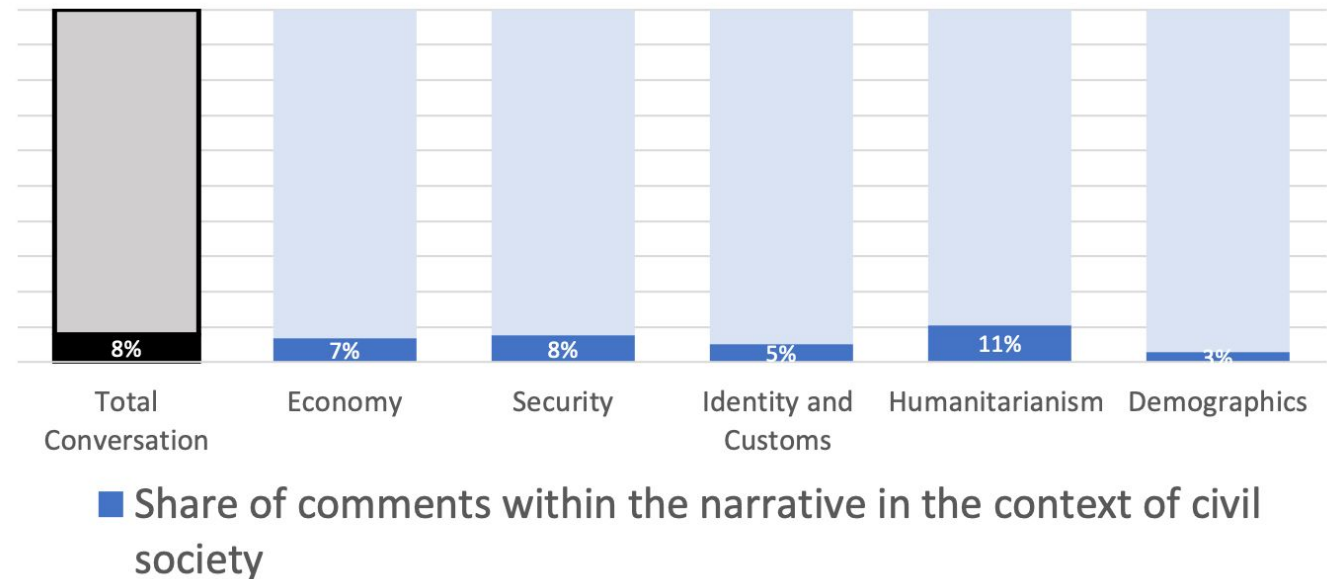
*Just say the word ‘Soros’ and bam, **everybody forgets the real problems that are present in the healthcare- or the education system.***



Apart from George Soros, organizations of the civil society were accused by the Hungarian government to support illegal migration in Hungary. The government claimed that Soros funds civil organisations to execute his plan of deteriorating stability in Hungary.

An extensive hate campaign was initiated against civil organisations, summoned up by the 'Stop Soros' bill which binds civil organizations to register and declare all their international funding, and pay 25% tax in case majority of their funding comes from overseas.

*“By now it is clear that migration is an **organized mass of people led towards Europe by human traffickers and civil organisations** (so called NGOs) which are funded from abroad.”*



# + *Migration in the Context of European- and Domestic Politics*



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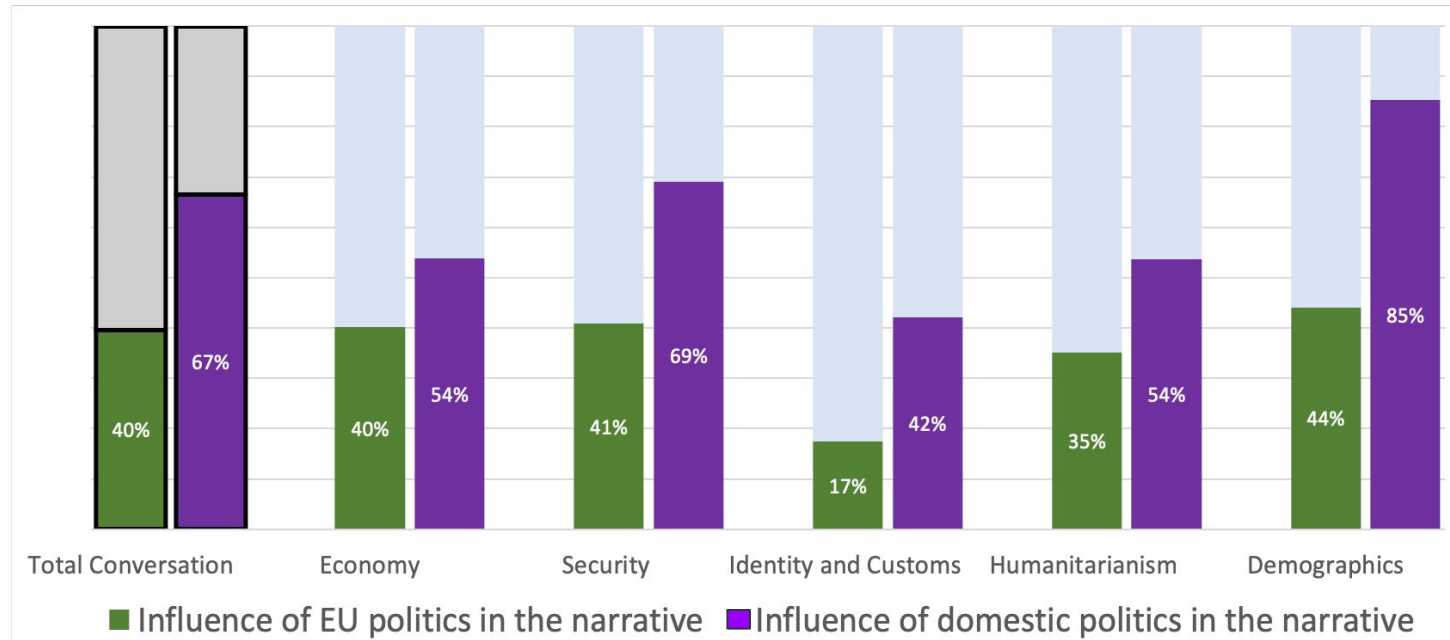


# European and Domestic Politics Context within Narratives | HU

## The Conversation is Deeply Infused with Politics

The conversation in Hungary around migration is mainly driven by the government's agenda to fuel hate against immigrants. The key strategic reason behind pushing this agenda was to built up a complete narrative framework for the 2018 parliamentary election, and arguing the necessity to protect Hungary against the immigrant "invaders". Threats of immigration was discussed in regards to each narrative, and people picked up on the various arguments on public social media platforms, either by sharing or countering them.

Other member states and leading European politicians are mentioned to a lesser extent, as people cite both 'good' and 'bad' examples of how other countries are dealing with the pressure of migration.





# + *Discussion Tone in Hungary*



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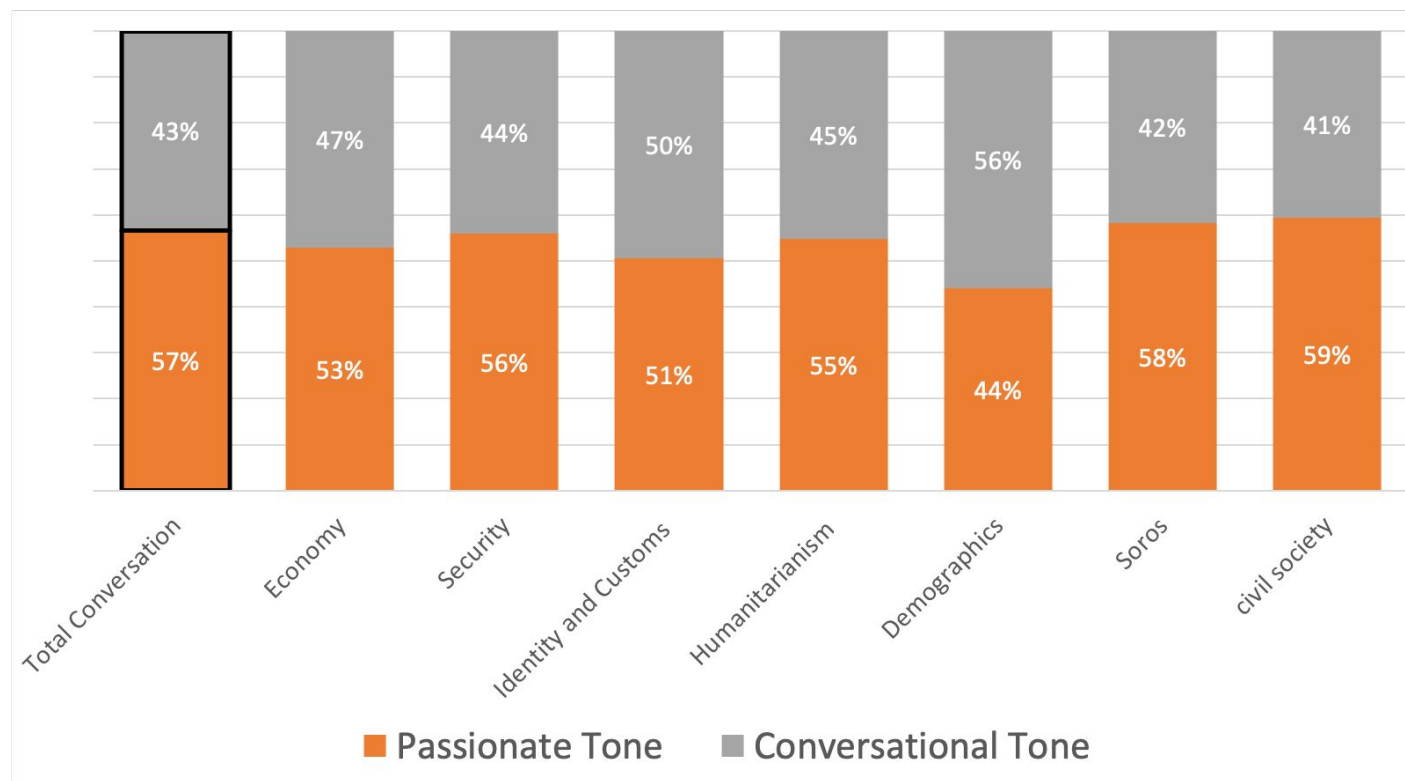
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# Highly Passionate Conversation on Migration

All aspects of the Hungarian conversation around migration are fuelled by intense passion. This can be traced back to fearmongering pursued by many online news articles, and the consequent rage that is arising while people discuss the security threat migration poses.

It is worth noting that the conversations around George Soros and the Hungarian civil society trigger the highest amount of passion, underlining that these topics effectively generate public interest around migration which, apart from the presence of a large number of refugees in Budapest in 2015, has little visibility in Hungary.



# + *Conversation Channels*



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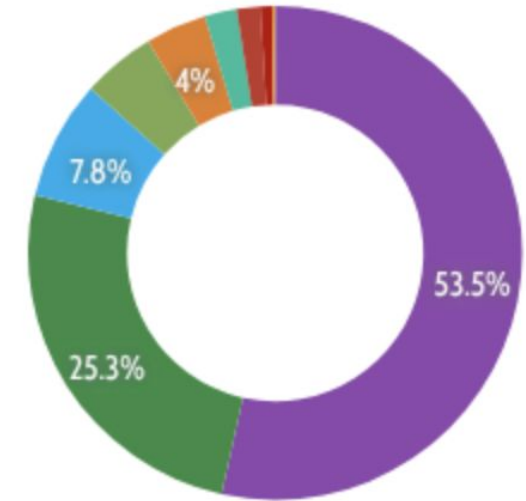
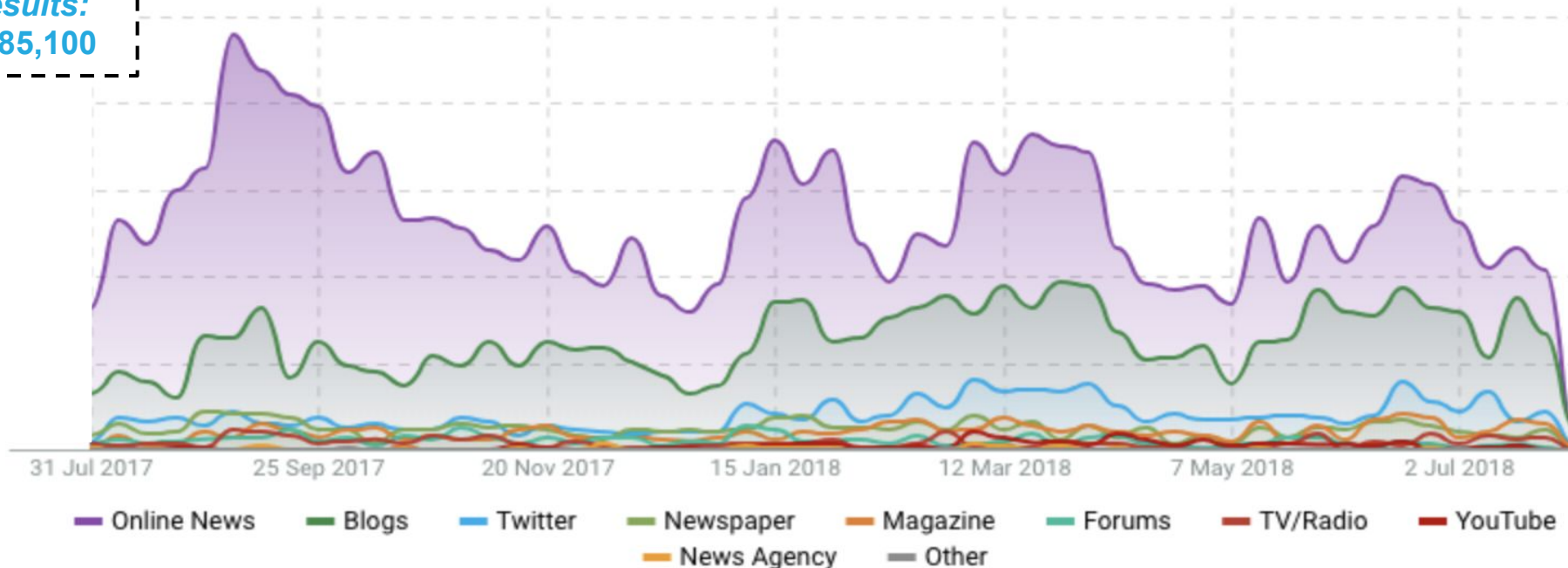
# Online News and Blogs Dominate the Conversation



Public online discussion around migration in Hungary mainly consists of edited content coming from journalists, as the most frequently used platforms are online news, blogs and newspapers.

This is in line with the tradition that Hungarians generally refrain from sharing political opinion on public online platforms (eg. public forums, Twitter, Instagram, etc).

**Results:**  
~385,100



- Online News
- Blogs
- Twitter
- Newspaper
- Magazine
- Forums
- TV/Radio
- YouTube
- News Agency
- Other



# Most Influential Authors | HU

## Right-Wing Agenda Dominates The Conversation

The migration crisis was most visible in Hungary in 2015, but the issue has been kept in the public conversation ever since. The government built up an extensive campaign to discuss various aspects of migration, and online news sites has been pivotal in keeping the issue alive in the online sphere.

Although both right- and left wing newspapers discussed the migration question, the dominance of right-wing platforms (and the fear-mongering narratives of the right-wing government) clearly prevail the discussion.

### Most Active Sites in the Overall Conversation

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| friss-hirek.hu     | news aggregator site   |
| hir-ozon.hu        | news aggregator site   |
| pestisracok.hu     | far-right news site  |
| hirmutato.hu       | news aggregator site   |
| gyakorikerdesek.hu | leading Hungarian-language forum site  |
| hirekma.hu         | news aggregator site   |
| hirek.animare.hu   | news aggregator site   |
| magyaridok.hu      | right-wing, nationalist-conservative news site   |
| hirado.hu          | primary news site of the state-owned national public-service broadcasting organization |
| hirek.ma           | news site not related to the government  |