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Hungarian Expellees and Refugees relocated from Czechoslovakia to Hungary (1945)

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Abstract

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The present study looks at Hungarian expellees and refugees from Czechoslovakia who migrated to Hungary in 1945, focusing specifically on the Hungarian government's refugee policy and its implementation. The paper explores the methods used by Czechoslovak authorities to expel ethnic Hungarians as well as the political reasoning behind these actions, with attention given to the broader context of post-war forced migrations in Central Europe and Hungary's dual role as both a "receiver" and "sender." The analysis highlights the currently limited historiographical treatment of this topic and investigates certain administrative procedures applied during the spring and summer of 1945. Additionally, the inconsistent use of terms such as "refugee" and "expellee" is addressed, using a wide range of primary sources, despite their fragmentary nature. The study further outlines the lack of clear legal definitions and the limitations of the contemporary international legal framework. Overall, the paper contributes to a deeper understanding of post-war migration processes and their social and political consequences.

During the Second World War and subsequent half-decade, Hungary experienced the arrival of a variety of refugee groups of various sizes and ethnicities through different periods. These movements were triggered by the contingencies of war, the border revisions following territorial re-annexations, the post-war restoration of the Trianon borders, and discriminatory policies adopted by neighbouring countries toward ethnic Hungarian minorities. During this time, Hungary functioned as a transit country; for Jews, Poles, and Germans, as a host country, for the Szeklers of Bukovina and ethnic Hungarian refugees from neighbouring countries, a sending country, which affected both Hungarian citizens and ethnic Germans simultaneously.

The local situation for these groups of refugees and the administrative measures applied by the state were closely intertwined with post-war mandatory migration processes, including the deportation of Germans for forced labour (*malenky robot*), their subsequent expulsion, the Czechoslovak-Hungarian population exchange, and organized internal resettlement programs. Until now, a systematic understanding of the interconnectedness of these events has been lacking. However, a recent foundational research project aims to address this historiographical lacuna, focusing on the state, ecclesiastical and societal attitudes toward Hungarian refugees, as well as the strategies of integration.

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This study examines a specific facet of the migratory processes between Czechoslovakia and Hungary; the state administrative procedures concerning persons expelled or those fleeing the country during the spring and summer of 1945. It is important to emphasize that while the history of the Hungarian minority in Upper Hungary between 1945 and 1948—encompassing the population exchange, the deportations to Bohemia, re-Slovakization, and internal resettlement—has become one of the most extensively researched periods of this community, scholar works dealing with these years of statelessness have paid little to no attention to the plight of expelled and refugee Hungarians.

The present study seeks to fill this gap. While briefly touching upon the proposals of the Great Powers put forward to resolve ethno-national conflicts and the respective national aspirations of Czechoslovakia and Hungary, the primary focus here lies on the procedural methods applied to ethnic Hungarians expelled by Czechoslovakia in the spring of 1945, the political justification, and the wider impact on the affected social strata. Furthermore, a detailed analysis of the policy positions of the Hungarian government on the refugee issue and the initial relief efforts offered to the expellees is provided. At the same time, several relevant questions have been omitted to maintain a certain scope of the study. Consequently, this paper does not address the intercessions of the Hungarian Government with the Allied Control Commission (ACC) on behalf of Hungarians in Slovakia, nor does it examine individual life histories or incorporation strategies within Hungary. The detailed exposition of these questions will remain the subject of a separate study.

From a methodological standpoint, it is imperative to highlight that as this study constitutes foundational research, a comprehensive approach to the sources of the period has been adopted, which sought to uncover the broadest possible spectrum of extant primary sources. Given the multiple layers of administrative involvement in refugee affairs spanning various levels of public administration, a substantial archival corpus has been preserved. However, the quality and availability of these records are markedly heterogeneous; in numerous instances, researchers had to contend with fragmentary or sporadic data. A salient finding of this investigation was the conspicuous absence of the refugee issue from contemporary public discourse, as the Hungarian government maintained a policy of informational suppression, concealing any developments from the public for several months. In reconstructing the broader historical and geopolitical context, the study draws extensively upon post-transition historiography, specifically works addressing the political history of the era, bilateral diplomatic relations, the socio-political status of the Hungarian minority in Czechoslovakia, and the geopolitical stratagems of the Great Powers. Such scholarly contributions are meticulously cited throughout the relevant sections of this paper.

Furthermore, one must observe a terminological inconsistency within the primary documentation regarding the affected individuals. Frequently used terms such as “expellee,” “refugee,” “displaced person,” “repatriate,” or even “deportee” were interchangeable synonyms. This terminological fluidity is rooted

in the fact that neither the Hungarian domestic legal order nor the national legislations of neighbouring countries provided a rigorous legal breakdown of what constituted “refugee” or “expellee” status. Consequently, the documents available exhibit a discursive diversity that reflects the subjective perspective of the official entering the records or the political interests of the host state. For the sake of analytical clarity, this study primarily adheres to the categories of “expellee” and “refugee.”

Regarding the legal status of those caught in the forced migration cycles of the Second World War, international regulatory frameworks of the era offer limited guidance. Although the post-First World War collapse of multi-ethnic empires and subsequent mass population transfers initiated the development of international minority protection, the interwar legal definition of a “refugee” remained strictly group-based. Under this paradigm, refugee status was not a universal legal category;¹ rather, it was a collective designation for citizens of specific states who had been divested of sovereign protection. The juridical emphasis was placed on collective identity and nationality rather than on the principle of individualized persecution. Ultimately, the unprecedented scale of post-war demographic displacement necessitated a fundamental paradigm shift in international thought concerning state responsibility and the protection of the displaced.² This evolution culminated in the 1951 *Geneva Refugee Convention*, which established the foundation of modern refugee law, transitioning the legislation from a narrow, collective approach to a comprehensive, rights-based definition centred on the well-founded fear of being persecuted.³ This legal transition lies beyond the temporal scope of the current inquiry, however.

Historical Context

In the aftermath of the First World War, the Great Powers officially asserted that the delimitation of the region’s new frontiers was to be guided by an equitable distribution of territories, respecting the ethnographic and demographic characteristics of the resident populations. In practice, however, these principles were ultimately subordinated to strategic and economic imperatives. Consequently, a significant number of national minorities remained within the newly established or enlarged states of East-Central and Southeast Europe. Motivated by escalating ethno-national tensions, the drive toward creating ethnically homogeneous nation-states gained significant momentum among the states concerned as early as the 1930s.⁴ Following the Second World War, drawing lessons from the perceived failures of the Versailles settlement, the Western Powers sought to minimize intra-regional ethno-territorial antagonisms, though they no longer sought to mitigate these conflicts through the traditional

1 For further details, see: GANCZER, Mónika. *Állampolgárság és államutódlás*. Budapest : Dialóg Campus, 2013.

2 For further details, see: GATRELL, Peter. *The Making of the Modern Refugee*. London : Oxford University Press, 2013.

3 *Law-Decree no. 15 of 1989 on the Promulgation of the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* adopted on 28 July 1951 and the *Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees* of 31 January 1967.

4 For further details, see: MACARTNEY, Carlile A. *National States and National Minorities*. London : Oxford University Press, 1934.

instruments of minority protection. Instead, they moved toward a more radical solution: the systematic reduction of minority populations through expulsion, deportation, and forced population transfers.

Such extreme measures were justified by several factors; the perceived threat that minorities posed to the stability of nation-states and bilateral relations, the practical precedents of population exchanges and resettlements executed earlier in the 20th century, the brutal occupation policies of the Nazi regime, and the westward geopolitical expansion of the Soviet Union.⁵ Simultaneously, the political elites of states in the region articulated similarly radical visions for their respective nations.

After the Second World War, leaders of the renascent Czechoslovakia blamed German and Hungarian minorities for the disintegration of the country in 1938–1939, though that was mainly influenced by foreign policy issues, ethnic tensions, and an unstable relationship between Czechs and Slovaks. The leadership completely rejected the idea of resolving the minority issue through reforming nationality policy or better border management, and set their sights on transforming Czechoslovakia into a Slavic nation-state. The demand for expulsion of non-Slavic minorities was first formulated by the Czechoslovak government-in-exile in London, led by Edvard Beneš. Originally concerning the expulsion of Germans only, the notion was officially expanded in December 1943 during Beneš' negotiations in Moscow to include the expulsion of Hungarians from Slovakia.

There, he outlined his conception for deportation of the two non-Slavic minorities in a memorandum sent to the Allies on 23 November 1944, asking for their help in implementing the plan. The 26-point memorandum was based on the assumption that national minorities were a source of serious tension in Central Europe, further arguing that the creation of pure nation-states was not possible through border changes, and that the deportation of Germans and Hungarians was the only viable solution for Czechoslovakia based on the experience of the World Wars. The authors of the memorandum considered the presence of the Hungarian minority to be less “dangerous” than that of the Sudeten Germans. At the same time, they emphasized the right of the Czechoslovak government to treat Hungarians who were hostile to the republic the same way as Germans. They also noted that the presence of a “significant number” of Slovaks in Hungary made it possible to “resolve the issue on a very broad basis through population exchange.”⁶ The Czechoslovak government did not rule out the possibility that a certain number of people with German and Hungarian

5 GONDA, Gábor. *Kitaszítva*. Pécs : Pécsi Egyháztörténeti Intézet, 2014, p. 34.

6 SZARKA, László (ed.) *Jogfosztó jogszabályok Csehszlovákiában 1944–1949*. Komárom : MTA Etnikai-nemzeti Kisebbségkutató Intézet; Kecskés László Társaság, 2005, p. 15. The text of the memorandum is published in: RICHARDSON, Dougall. *Foreign Relations of the United States. 1945, Vol. II*. Washington : United States Government Printing Office, 1960, pp. 1227–1237. On the years of disenfranchisement and the process leading to the signing of the population exchange agreement, see also: POPÉLY, Árpád. *Fél évszázad kisebbségben. Fejezetek a szlovákiai magyarság 1945 utáni történetéből*. Somorja : Fórum Kisebbségkutató Intézet, 2014, pp. 31–38; VADKERTY, Katalin. *A kitelepítéstől a reszlovakizációig. Trilógia a csehszlovákiai magyarság 1945–1948 közötti történetéről*. Bratislava : Kalligram, 2001, pp. 205–232; JANICS, Kálmán. *A hontalanság éve*. Munch : Európai Protestáns Magyar Szabadegyetem, 1980, pp. 51–176.

nationality would remain in the territory of the republic after these deportation efforts. However, it was made clear that these people would not be able to regain their linguistic rights, i.e., complete assimilation was expected.

The Moscow-based émigré community led by Klement Gottwald and the Slovak resistance did not have a clear vision for the post-war fate of the Hungarian and German minorities. However, following Beneš' trip in December 1943, both adopted the ideas of the Czechoslovak government-in-exile in London, and the first disenfranchisement measures were already underway in the autumn of 1944 during the Slovak national uprising.⁷ At the turn of 1944–1945, actions aimed at ethnic homogenization began, through the course of which some 30 thousand Hungarian civilians from Czechoslovakia were deported to the Soviet Union for forced labour.⁸

The Anglo-Saxon powers rejected the diplomatic efforts of Czechoslovakia to resettle the Hungarians unilaterally. Thus, despite the strong Soviet support, this was not included in the armistice agreement signed with Hungary on 20 February 1945. However, the Prague government and the Slovak National Council did not abandon their original intention. This was made clear by the *Košický vládný program* (Košice Government Program) published on 5 April 1945, which became the core document and reference point for subsequent anti-Hungarian and anti-German deprivation measures. Although the fundamental aim of the *Košický vládný program* was to establish the most important elements of a new federal model of coexistence between the Czech and Slovak nations, from a national perspective, it envisaged the complete elimination of these two minorities.⁹

By outlawing and persecuting the Hungarian minority, the Czechoslovak government sought to exert pressure on both the great powers and Hungary, seeking to force the former to agree to the unilateral deportation of Hungarians, and the latter to accept them. Hungary had limited sovereignty until the peace treaty and was unable to maintain direct diplomatic relations. Thus, it could only communicate with Czechoslovakia through the Soviet-led ACC and the Czechoslovak representative, Dalibor Krno. However, the Prague government never succeed in getting the great powers to agree to the unilateral deportation of Hungarians, neither by increasing its international diplomatic activity¹⁰ nor by intensifying the persecution of Hungarians.¹¹

7 Based on *Decree No. 18/1944* of the President of the Republic and the Decree of the Office of the Poverenictvo vnútra Slovenskej národnej rady (Commissioner for Internal Affairs of the Slovak National Council; SNR) dated 27 September 1944, members of the German and Hungarian minorities were prohibited from participating in the national committees. SZARKA 2005, p. 26 and POPÉLY 2014, p. 33.

8 SZARKA 2005, pp. 23–24.

9 In addition to the directives concerning citizenship in Chapter VIII, Chapters X and XI provided for the expropriation of the property of the two minorities, while Chapter XV ordered the complete liquidation of the German and Hungarian school systems. SZARKA 2005, p. 25. The discriminatory measures are presented and analysed in detail, see: SZARKA 2005.

10 Although the great powers did not consent to the unilateral expulsion of the Hungarian population from Slovakia, the SNR and various Slovak political parties drafted several plans in this regard starting in the spring of 1945. For further details on this subject, see: POPÉLY 2014, pp. 33–38.

11 Between 2 April 1945 and 27 October 1945, a total number of 98 presidential decrees were issued, 13 of which concerned the German and Hungarian minorities directly. The disenfranchisement

The final document of the Potsdam Conference, which ended on 2 August 1945, only dealt with the expulsion of Germans. Nevertheless, the Czechoslovak government attempted to interpret it as if the expulsion also applied to Hungarians. Czechoslovak foreign minister Jan Masaryk, who presented the conference decisions to his government on 3 August 1945, stated that although “the Potsdam Conference dealt with the German question exclusively, the fact that no mention was made of the deportation of Hungarians does not mean that it cannot be carried out.”¹² Shortly after the Potsdam Conference, on 16 August 1945, Czechoslovakia sent another note to the great powers requesting support for the population exchange and the authorization of the ACC in Hungary to carry it out.¹³

As mentioned above, the Provisional national government of Hungary led by Béla Miklós Dálnoki had limited sovereignty. With regard to Hungarians living in neighbouring countries, the head of government emphasized that “not only are the people of this country entrusted to our care, but also, based on an inalienable natural right, the fate of the millions of Hungarians living beyond our borders.”¹⁴ He subordinated their situation to reconciliation and good neighbourly relations. From the outset, the Hungarian government had information on the persecution of Hungarians in Czechoslovakia, which it tried to conceal initially and did not treat with the seriousness it deserved. However, the scale of the persecution forced Hungarian leadership to regularly intervene with the ACC.¹⁵

The efforts made by the Hungarian government on behalf of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia were undermined by its own application of the principle of collective guilt to the German minority in Hungary. From early 1945, similar measures were introduced depriving Germans of their rights and seeking to resettle them. In May 1945, the Hungarian government itself asked the great powers for the possibility of deporting Germans from Hungary, to which consent was given at the Potsdam Conference. This deportation of Germans from Hungary then served as a basis for the Czechoslovak government in the population exchange negotiations, arguing that there were places available in Hungary to accommodate the Hungarian population of Slovakia.¹⁶

extended to many areas of life, including citizenship, national identity, property, and linguistic rights. SZARKA 2005, p. 26.

12 POPÉLY 2014, p. 37. Likely not a coincidence, but the *Presidential Decree no. 33* was promulgated on the same day as the Potsdam Decisions were published. This decree denied the restoration of Czechoslovak citizenship to Germans and Hungarians—despite the fact that the *Munich Agreement* and the *Vienna Award* were declared null and void—and furthermore, stripped it from those who had remained citizens of Czechoslovakia even after 1938. SZARKA 2005, pp. 167–173. For a detailed analysis of the issue of citizenship, see: ŠUTAJ, Štefan. A Magyar nemzetiségű lakosság csehszlovák állampolgársága 1945 után a cseh-szlovák kapcsolatok szempontjából. In ŠUTAJ, Štefan. *Magyarok Csehszlovákiában 1945–1948 között. Tanulmányok a beneši dekrétumokról, a csehországi deportálásokról és a lakosságcseréről*. Budapest : Lucidus, 2008, pp. 19–46.

13 POPÉLY 2014, p. 37.

14 *Ideiglenes Nemzetgyűlés Naplója*, convened in Debrecen on 21 December 1944, and later summoned to Budapest (Authentic edition). Budapest : Athenaeum Press (n.d.), pp. 144–145.

15 By June 1945, the Hungarian government had submitted 32 written protests to the ACC regarding the persecution of Hungarians in Slovakia, and by early November, this number had risen to more than 150 cases. VASS, G. István (ed.) *Tildy Zoltán kormányának minisztertanácsi jegyzőkönyvei 1945. November 15–1946. február 4*. Budapest : Magyar Országos Levéltár, 2005, pp. 51–52.

16 TÓTH, Ágnes. *Telepítések Magyarországon 1945–1948 között*. Kecskemét : Bács-Kiskun Megyei

In the course of preliminary peace negotiations, the Hungarian government rejected both the concept of unilateral expulsion and the principle of population exchange, stipulating that the reception of the ethnic Hungarian population be contingent upon territorial compensation. Therefore, in the fall of 1945, the Czechoslovak government began deporting the Hungarian population of Slovakia to Czechoslovakia with the undisguised intention of forcing Hungary to agree to a population exchange. Since the great powers failed to take any action against such renewed atrocities against the Hungarian population in Slovakia, the Hungarian government was forced into bilateral negotiations.

The population exchange agreement signed in Budapest on 27 February 1946 cannot be considered as a fair agreement between two equal parties. While Slovaks in Hungary were permitted to apply for resettlement voluntarily, Czechoslovak authorities designated ethnic Hungarians for forced transfer. Although the agreement imposed several stringent provisions on the Hungarian government regarding implementation of the exchange, in many instances, the Hungarian side failed to ensure even the observance of these terms. However, the agreement did provide an organized, institutional, and controlled framework for the process. The population exchange took place between April 1947 and the end of December 1948. According to the final report of the Government Commission for Hungarian Resettlement, a total number of 87 839 Hungarians settled or were resettled from Czechoslovakia to Hungary, while 71 215 Slovaks left Hungary for Czechoslovakia.¹⁷

Refugees–Expellees–Government measures

When the Provisional National Government was formed in December 1944, there were already masses of Hungarian refugees living in the territory of Hungary—as defined by the *Treaty of Trianon*—who had originated from neighbouring countries. They had left their homeland as a result of the war or fearing persecution following the change of power. For this reason, Géza Teleki, Minister of Religion and Public Education, urged the Council of Ministers at a meeting on 1 February 1945 to resolve the refugee situation comprehensively, and to this end, to appoint a government commissioner responsible for refugees.¹⁸ He estimated the number of people who had fled from the areas to be evacuated under the *Armistice Agreement* at around 400–450 thousand and considered it imperative to resolve the situation from both a domestic and a foreign policy perspective.¹⁹

In Article 2 of the *Armistice Agreement*, the Hungarian government undertook to:

[...] withdraw all Hungarian troops and officials from the territories they occupied in Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Romania beyond the borders of Hungary as they existed on 31 December 1937, and repeal all legislative and administrative regulations relating to the annexation.²⁰

Önkormányzat Levéltára, 1993, pp. 29–36.

17 POPÉLY 2014, p. 49; TÓTH 1993, pp. 152–182.

18 SZŰCS, László (ed.) *Dálnoki Miklós Béla kormányának (Ideiglenes Nemzeti Kormány) minisztertanácsai jegyzőkönyvei 1944. december 23–1945. november 15*, Vol. A. Budapest : Magyar Országos Levéltár, 1997, p. 156.

19 SZŰCS 1997, pp. 386–387.

20 HALMOSY, Dénes (ed.) *Nemzetközi szerződések 1918–1945*. Budapest : Közgazdasági és Jogi

Among other obligations, state representatives also promised to establish a new, democratic state structure. This brought a verification of state and local government employees during the reorganization of the administration which included a review of their past political behaviour. The relevant legislation was published in the beginning of 1945, before the signing of the *Armistice Agreement*.²¹ At a 18–19 January 1945 meeting, the Council of Ministers decided on the verification of state and municipal officials returning from the annexed territories.²²

The Council of Ministers discussed the operational tasks related to the obligations undertaken in the *Armistice Agreement* first on 9 February 1945. Among other things, they adopted *Decree No. 526/1945 ME minisztertanácsi rendelet* (Decree of the Prime Minister), on the repeal of the articles of law concerning territorial changes in Hungary.²³ However, no decision was made on the recall of military personnel and civil servants, nor on the rules governing this process. Foreign Minister Gyöngyösi emphasized that during his negotiations on Northern Transylvania with the ACC, he had become convinced that they did not consider it necessary to issue such a decree, but rather “turn a blind eye to the matter. Accordingly, if any civil servants return, they must be employed, but it is not necessary to recall them.”²⁴ The Hungarian government did not issue a decree on the return of civil servants posted in reclaimed territories to Hungary, so their situation in those months was determined by the actions of the Czechoslovak, Romanian, and Yugoslav authorities, though officials made such statements as if this had happened. Thus, at the meeting of the Council of Ministers on 9 March 1945, Foreign Minister János Gyöngyösi stated in his report on the implementation of the *Armistice Agreement* that the Hungarian administrative and military authorities had “already fully complied” with Article 2.²⁵ He emphasized that the Minister of the Interior had already informed Major General Beljanov, head of the administrative department of the ACC, of this.

The challenges posed by the growing number of refugees and the persecution of Hungarians in neighbouring countries were discussed by the government on several occasions in April 1945. While they focused on the principles of paying for and providing assistance to returning expelled officials at the meeting of 18 April, a week later, they discussed the establishment of a refugee office and a government commission to deal with general refugee issues at the meetings of 25 and 27 April. Interior Minister Ferenc Erdei, who made the proposal at both events, made it clear that the fate of the refugees could “only be resolved in connection with the Swabian question, which was already awaiting a solution.”²⁶ Therefore, he requested the approval of Council of Ministers for

Könyvkiadó, 1983, p. 586.

21 15/1945. ME. rendelet a közalkalmazottak igazolásáról, 16/1945. ME. sz. rendelet a szolgálattételre való jelentkezés kötelezettségéről. In *Magyar Közlöny*, 4 January 1945, pp. 3–4.

22 77/1945. ME. rendelet. In *Magyar Közlöny*, 27 January 1945, p. 2; VASS, István G. A menekültügy kezelése Magyarországon 1945–1946-ban. In MOLNÁR, Imre – SZARKA, László (eds.) *Ottontalan emlékezet. Emlékkönyv a csehszlovák-magyar lakosságcsere 60. évfordulójára*. Komárom; Budapest : MTA Kisebbségkutató Intézet/Kecskés László Társaság, 2007, pp. 101–113.

23 *Magyar Közlöny*, 17 March 1945, p. 2.

24 SZŰCS 1997, p. 189.

25 SZŰCS 1997, p. 261.

26 SZŰCS 1997, p. 389.

a rapid and radical resettlement of the Swabians in Tolna and Baranya counties so that the refugees could be placed on the farms that had been vacated.²⁷

On 4 May 1945, the Council of Ministers discussed the implementation of the *Armistice Agreement* in detail again. Compiled by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the report emphasized that Hungary had fulfilled Article 2 by repealing the legislation on territorial restitution. Nevertheless, it was emphasized that the neighbouring countries had not complied with it “as the local and Soviet authorities did not allow the transport of personal belongings of the returning officials, and in some cases they held them back at the border.”²⁸

The government also adopted *Decree No. 1710/1945 ME* (Decree of the Prime Minister), on the establishment of the Népgondozó Hivatal (Office for People’s Care).²⁹ The duties of this agency included taking the necessary temporary measures for Hungarian civil servants who had been recalled from beyond the border defined as of 31 December 1937, or who had returned voluntarily or for other reasons. It also had to provide accommodation, resettlement, and assistance to the Hungarian population not in public service who had also come from these areas. In order to perform these tasks, the Agency needed to keep records of those concerned. In addition, it had to provide assistance and transportation for Allied prisoners of war and internees, as well as for returning Hungarian citizens who had been deported. Further tasks included the “implementation of the deportation of fascist Germans,” for which detailed regulations were promised to be embodied in a further government decree.³⁰

The establishment of the Népgondozó Hivatal made it possible to deal with the refugee issues in a unified and comprehensive manner. The office’s activities were no longer primarily focused on providing temporary accommodation and assistance to refugees, but rather on ensuring their long-term livelihood and promoting economic, cultural, and political integration through methodical registration. At the same time, the agency was placed under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior rather than the Prime Minister’s Office, which on the one hand, reflected the actual political balance of power and on the other hand, caused numerous disputes over jurisdiction between the various ministries in the following months. The sharpest debates arose with the National Land Distribution Council, led by Péter Veres, over the settlement of unused land holdings during the land reform. In addition, the direct link made by the government between the resettlement of refugees and the punishment of the German minority in Hungary on the basis of the principle of collective guilt proved to be extremely damaging.³¹

27 SZÜCS 1997, pp. 336, 372–373, 384–389.

28 SZÜCS 1997, p. 410.

29 *Magyar Közlöny*, 10 May 1945, pp. 5–6.

30 *Magyar Közlöny*, 10 May 1945, p. 6; 3820/1945. ME. rendelet a Népgondozó Hivatal németek kitelepítésével összefüggő feladatairól. In *Magyar Közlöny*, 1 July 1945, pp. 2–3. It should be noted that the efforts of the Hungarian government regarding the expulsion of the German minority were supported solely by the Soviet Union at this time. The government received the consent of the Allied powers for the realisation of its plans at the Potsdam Conference.

31 The Népgondozó Hivatal was dissolved by *Decree No. 7310/1946. ME*, effective as of 30 June 1946. Tasks related to the resettlement of refugees were taken over by the Országos Földhivatal (National Land Office), while the welfare and care duties were transferred to the Ministry of Social Welfare. In *Magyar Közlöny*, 27 June 1946, p. 1.

Decree No. 5070/1945 ME (Decree of the Prime Minister), issued on the subject of temporary certification of Hungarian citizenship, also served to regulate the situation of the Hungarian refugees.³² According to this decree, those who had acquired Hungarian citizenship as residents of the territories returned to Hungary from Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia between 1938 and 1941, and whose permanent residence was in Hungary at the time of the issuance of the decree, were granted Hungarian citizenship until further notice. Subsequently, the cases of these people as well as new migrants were examined one by one, and decisions were based on the individual examination of their citizenship status. This transitional provision enabled them to receive benefits, take up employment, obtain operating licenses, and receive land or housing benefits.³³

The expulsion of ethnic Hungarians from Czechoslovakia³⁴

The program of the new Czechoslovak government, formed on 5 April 1945, in Košice under the leadership of Social Democrat Zdeněk Fierlinger, reflected an increasingly radical stance of the London and Moscow émigré circles toward the German and Hungarian minorities. Point VIII of the *Košický vládný program*—through the revocation of citizenship—and further decrees and regulations issued in 1945 gradually made it clear that only active anti-fascists could be exempted from the revocation of all civil rights affecting the two minority groups.³⁵ Although the possibility of opting for citizenship was apparently left open, in practice, Hungarians could only obtain Czechoslovak citizenship through forced Slovakization. The government program also stated that Germans and Hungarians who had moved to the territory of the Czechoslovak Republic after 1938, following the *Munich Agreement*, would be immediately expelled from the country if no criminal proceedings were brought against them.³⁶

The census of the so-called *anyáši* (in Hungarian: *anyások*)—a nickname for the Hungarians who had moved there from Hungary—began in accordance with the instructions of the National Headquarters of the National Security Corps on 16 April 1945, which were further clarified in a circular letter from the Department of the Interior Commissioner at the beginning of May. Accordingly, all *anyáši* officials of the Hungarian National Party and intellectuals were subject to mandatory deportation. Some exceptions were made for doctors, skilled workers essential to reconstruction, and members of the Communist Party.³⁷

Expulsions had already begun in several locations, for example in Košice on 1 March 1945. The expellees from Košice who found temporary refuge in Miskolc wrote the following in a letter to the Prime Minister on 1 May 1945:

The expulsion of Hungarians and their plundering by Slovak partisans has taken place. Many of us left the city in a snowstorm, with only a small bundle in our hands, and crossed the Trianon border. Our homes were confiscated, along with

32 *Magyar Közlöny*, 21 July 1945, p. 2.

33 VASS 2007, pp. 103–104.

34 The cited examples illustrate the procedural methods applied to various social strata.

35 For the rights-depriving measures, see: SZARKA, 2005.

36 SZARKA 2005, pp. 43–44.

37 VADKERTY 2001, p. 210; SZARKA 2005, p. 263.

our furniture, clothes, underwear, etc. A superficial inventory was made of the items in the apartment, but no copy was provided. In many cases, we had to leave the apartment without an inventory being taken, and it was either sealed or someone else moved in immediately.³⁸

Expulsion orders were delivered by law enforcement officers. Those affected had to leave their homes within a few hours and were allowed to take a maximum of 50 kg of luggage with them.³⁹

The authors of the letter suggested that if the Slovak state did not ensure the return of their property or compensation, the Hungarian government should do so by expelling the Slovak population from Hungary in the same manner. According to the position of the Prime Minister's Office, "steps have already been taken to end the expulsions, and the retaliation requested by the petitioners is inopportune at this time."⁴⁰

In June 1945, when most of the seconded officials had already returned home, *Decree No. 749/1945* was issued by the Slovak Povereníctvo financií (Financial Commissioner) allowing the removal of personal belongings. However, local authorities hindered its implementation.

As mentioned above, Czechoslovak authorities not only expelled the state employees overnight, but also all Hungarians who had moved to the area after 2 November 1938. Among them there were many pensioners and private clerks, most of whom moved back to their old homes and native lands. In addition, there were a large number of people working as freelance intellectuals—lawyers, doctors, artists—as well as engineers and skilled workers employed in the factories operating there, priests who had been stationed there for decades,

38 Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár (MNL OL), Budapest, Miniszterelnökség iratai 1944–1949, XIX-A-1-j, 2557/1945, Illényi Domokos és társai kassai kiutasítottak panasza, 1 May 1945.

39 In several locations, the paramilitaries themselves determined which belongings could be taken. For instance, in Košice, Lučenec, and Želiezovce, they prohibited those returning to Hungary from taking their baby layettes with them. MNL OL, Budapest, Békeelőkészítő Osztály iratai 1945–1951, XIX-J-1-a, IV-69-1945-1947, Box 44, A magyarság helyzete a második Csehszlovákiában című memorandum, 20 November 1945. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, János Gyöngyösi, dispatched the memorandum to the Soviet, French, and British diplomatic missions in Budapest. In his letter, Gyöngyösi emphasized that the Hungarian government, in its note of 13 August 1945 (61/res. Be-1945), had already requested the establishment of a commission composed of the permanent members of the UN Security Council to investigate the actions of the Czechoslovak government against Hungary and the contentious issues between the two countries. Since the situation of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia had significantly deteriorated, the Hungarian government repeatedly requested the formation of an international commission of inquiry and the placement of Hungarian-populated areas of Slovakia under international supervision. MNL OL, XIX-J-1-a-IV-69-1945-1947, Box 44; MNL OL XIX-J-1-a-IV-69-1945-1947, Box 44, Memorandum, 20 November 1945. In Štúrovo and its surroundings, it was proclaimed by drumbeat on 25 May that those who had moved to the area after 1938 were required to leave within 24 hours, and were permitted to take all their belongings with them. Those failing to comply with the order would be interned and allowed to take only a 50 kg package. MNL OL, XIX-A-1-j, 2582/1945. Bizalmas információk, 28 May 1945.

40 MNL OL, XIX-A-1-j, 2557/1945. Illényi Domokos és társai kassai kiutasítottak panasza, 1 May 1945. It must be noted, however, that the idea of preventing the expulsion of Hungarians through coercive measures against the Slovaks living in Hungary was not far removed from the intentions of certain administrative leaders either. This notion was also raised by the Minister of the Interior, Ferenc Erdei, in his proposal concerning the separatist movement of the Slovaks in Békés, which was discussed at the Council of Ministers meeting on 13 May 1945. Ultimately, the Minister of the Interior withdrew his proposal regarding reprisals and instead urged that those openly opposing the Hungarian authorities be subjected to administrative proceedings. SZŰCS 1997, pp. 547, 552–553.

nuns engaged in charitable work, and women who had married local men.⁴¹ The expulsion of the *anyáši* took place largely in May and June 1945.

At the same time, the Czechoslovak authorities began expelling the indigenous Hungarian population and forcing them to flee. On the one hand, this was intended to put pressure on the Hungarian government to accept the plan of unilateral deportation of Hungarians from Slovakia. On the other hand, they sought to achieve a goal set by the parties of the Slovak National Front on 30 May 1945, namely the Slovakization of Hungarian cities, through cultural, economic, and political measures against the Hungarians, as well as through expulsions.⁴² Thirdly, the redistribution of confiscated property (i.e., land, houses, small businesses) served to broaden and stabilize the voter base of the left-wing parties.

In Bratislava, “police officers broke into the homes of Hungarians and recorded the names of the residents” in the last days of April 1945.⁴³ In the expulsion orders delivered a few days later, authorities referred to Section 37 of the *Czechoslovak State Security Law No. 131/1936*, according to which the person in question was of Hungarian nationality and therefore engaged in anti-state behaviour. The order did not specify where to or when the people concerned had to leave. However, the police carried out evictions and confiscation of the apartments the following day, with only a few minutes allowed for packing belongings. The Hungarians were placed in an internment camp set up in Petržalka and in an ammunition factory on the outskirts of Bratislava, where 10–20 thousand people were crammed together within a few days. “The displaced Hungarians were stripped of the few possessions they had brought with them, all their valuables (i.e., money, watches, jewellery, etc.) and all their personal documents.”⁴⁴

The command of the internment camp allowed some of those affected to cross the border for six days. Those who were able to return to Hungary not only recounted their experience, but also urged the Hungarian government to secure the release of their detained relatives, to transport their belongings that had remained in Slovakia, and to ensure proper conditions for their settlement in Hungary. The Prime Minister’s Office rejected the request, justifying its position by stating that if the Hungarian government initiated transfer of the internees to Hungary, it would legalize the Czechoslovak procedure, which would lead to a whole series of new expulsions, and many others would voluntarily try to get from Slovakia (sic) to Hungary, “It is clear that a beggar country that has been robbed of everything [...] would not even be able to provide the bread necessary for survival.”⁴⁵

41 MNL OL, XIX-J-1-a-IV-69-1945-1947, Box 44, Memorandum, 20 November 1945. In the hospital of Levice, the nurses were Sisters of the Holy Cross of Hungarian nationality, who were expelled from the institution by the new Slovak hospital director. MNL OL, XIX-A-1-j, 2582/1945, Bizalmas információk, 28 May 1945.

42 MNL OL, XIX-J-1-a-IV-69-1945-1947, Box 44, Memorandum, 20 November 1945.

43 MNL OL, XIX-A-1-j, 2583/1945. Stelczer Lajos (Magyar Párt központi igazgató) memorandumuma a szlovákiai magyarok kiutasításáról, 18 May 1945; TÓTH, László (ed.) *“Hívebb emlékezésül...” Csehszlovákiai magyar emlékiratok és egyéb dokumentumok a jogfosztottság éveiből 1945–1948*. Bratislava : Kalligram, 1995, pp. 37–40.

44 MNL OL, XIX-A-1-j 2583/1945, 18 May 1945.

45 MNL OL, XIX-A-1-j, 8734/1945. Ligetfaluba kiutasítottak személyesen előadott panasza, 18 September 1945.

In other towns, Slovak authorities did not even consider it necessary to give a reason for the expulsion or to deliver a written order, they simply interned people of Hungarian nationality and released them only after they had signed a document stating that they were leaving Czechoslovakia voluntarily. In some cases, simply threw people across the border:

I saw how the Slovak customs officers took everything from the expelled Hungarians. They were not even allowed to take the permitted 30–50 kg of luggage with them. [...] The customs officers kept the confiscated items for themselves. In the district of Kráľovský Chlmec, which consists of 41 purely Hungarian villages, 74 Hungarian teachers were dismissed, many of whom had taught here during the Czechoslovak Republic and had been taken over by the Hungarians. There are also Slovaks among them, but because they remained here under the Hungarians, they were dismissed. Officials from the courts, tax offices, and financial administrations were also dismissed.⁴⁶

Among the Hungarian urban population, mass expulsions took place mainly in Bratislava, Košice, Rimavská Sobota, Lučenec, Rožňava, and Levice. By mid-September of 1945, approximately 10 thousand families had been unlawfully expelled. In all cases, the Czechoslovak authorities confiscated the belongings of those expelled and seized their real estate.⁴⁷

Slovak authorities took a different approach with the rural population. In April and May, the Povereníctvo pôdohospodárstva a pozemkovej reformy (Commissioner for Agriculture and Land Reform) directed Slovak families to Hungarian villages. The Hungarian farmers had to leave their homes within a few hours and were not allowed to take anything with them except the most essential personal belongings and food. During the summer months, the rural population targeted for expulsion was interned first and then forced to leave the country in a variety of ways.

At the beginning of the summer, Slovak and Moravian settlers who had been forced to leave the village of Blažov in the Dunajská Streda district in 1938 returned to their homes. It was announced in the village that the previous Hungarian owners had to leave their land, including all living and dead inventory, and hand everything over to the returning settlers.⁴⁸

According to Slovak data, 1 623 Slovak families had been settled in Hungarian villages by the end of July 1945, mainly from where wealthier Hungarian families had been expelled.⁴⁹ Among those forced out, there were also a relatively large number of Hungarian-speaking Jews. By November 1945, some 200 Jewish families had been expelled to Hungary. Of the 3 000 Jewish residents of Lučenec, 240 returned from the camps in Germany, 140 of whom were subsequently expelled by Slovak authorities.⁵⁰

46 MNL OL, XIX-A-1-j, 5938/1945. Vas Béla levele Révay Józsefnének, 10 July 1945.

47 For more details regarding specific settlements and districts, see: MNL OL, XIX-J-1-a-IV-69-1945-1947, Box 44, Memorandum, 20 November 1945; MNL OL, XIX-A-1-j 7104/1945, A rimaszombati magyarok kiutasítása, 13 August 1945; MNL OL XIX-A-1-j 5245/1945, A szlovákiai magyarok üldözéséről értesülések, 3 July 1945; MNL OL, XIX-A-1-j 7101/1945, A szlovákiai magyarság kitelepítése, 25 August 1945.

48 MNL OL, XIX-A-1-j 5245/1945, 3 July 1945.

49 MNL OL, XIX-J-1-a-IV-69-1945-1947, Box 44, Memorandum, 20 November 1945.

50 Zoltán Brieger, a paint merchant, was expelled from Lučenec at the end of June 1945. Prior to this, his residence was searched, after which he was arrested and detained for ten days. He was

Those who were removed first came into contact with the border guard units and the local authorities of border towns in Hungary. The latter were responsible for providing temporary care and accommodation for those affected, as well as organizing their onward transport after a few days or weeks of stay. Although the Népgondozó Hivatal was established in a legal sense at the beginning of May 1945, it took weeks or months to develop an organizational structure and secure staff. Border towns were then essentially left without the means to carry out the tasks assigned to them. The Sub-prefect of Borsod County repeatedly requested effective assistance from the Népgondozó Hivatal and the Prime Minister's Office.

From 17 April 1945, expellees arrived continuously in the village of Bánréve, and village authorities took care of them “with the greatest difficulty,” providing each 12 thousand Hungarian *pengős* as emergency aid. At the end of June 1945, there were 229 expelled families in the village, but it was not possible to find accommodation for them. “There are a total of 300 houses, most of which are damaged, [...] [these] houses are also occupied by Russian and Hungarian soldiers, but mainly by railway workers.”⁵¹ Therefore, the Sub-prefect asked the Népgondozó Hivatal to move the refugees further.

In addition to organizing basic humanitarian aid for those who had been expelled, the Hungarian government also sought to prevent the mass transfer of non-native Hungarians—those with Czechoslovak citizenship—who had been expelled without any explanation or sufficient justification. A partial closure of the Hungarian-Czechoslovak border was ordered by the Hungarian government in August 1945, followed by a total closure in September.⁵² As a result, those affected often found themselves stranded in the border zone separating the two countries. The following situation described by the clerk of Bánréve cannot be considered an isolated case.

On the morning of 5 August 1945:

18 families (37 people) were expelled from Slovakia. [...] In the afternoon of the 5th, Hungarian border guards transferred all those expelled back to Slovakia by order of the high command. In the morning of 6 August, the Slovak border guards again expelled the 18 Hungarian families, and at this time, the expelled Hungarians are waiting for further action on the Hungarian border near Bánréve. If the Slovaks do not allow them to return by the evening, I have asked the border guard command to allow the expellees to be accommodated.⁵³

then forced through beatings to sign a previously prepared statement claiming he was leaving Czechoslovakia voluntarily. Following this, he was permitted neither to return to his home nor to his shop; Slovak authorities transported him to the Hungarian border. MNL OL, XIX-J-1-a-IV-69-1945-1947, Box 44, Memorandum, 20 November 1945. In Bratislava, an American journalist was shocked to discover that Jews of Hungarian nationality were also being held in the internment camps of Petržalka and in the Patrónka ammunition factory. MNL OL, XIX-A-1-j, 5209/1945, Csehszlovákiai politikai értesülések, 20 July 1945.

51 MNL OL, XIX-A-1-j 5733/1945, Bánréve községbe érkezett menekültek elhelyezése, 27 June 1945.

52 On 4 August 1945, the Slovak authorities also ordered a border closure along the Putnok-Záhony border section, where the majority of the expelled individuals had been transferred to Hungary. MNL OL, XIX-A-1-j, 6774/1945, Határzár elrendelése, 13 August 1945.

53 MNL OL, XIX-A-1-j 6712/1945, A Szlovákiából kiutasított magyarok ügye, 23 August 1945. The military recorded minutes for every affected family. According to these records, the individuals involved were wealthy Czechoslovak citizens with local residency.

Hungarian Minister of Defense, János Vörös, appealed to the ACC, requesting that only those Hungarian officials and soldiers specified in the *Armistice Agreement* be allowed to cross from Czechoslovakia, “because the expelled masses are disrupting the order of the border communities and the peace of the border population.”⁵⁴

Number of Refugees and Expellees (August 1945–June 1946)

In mid-June of 1945, the Hungarian Prime Minister’s Office instructed the Népgondozó Hivatal to compile a list of refugees who had fled from Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia to Hungary, “because it is necessary from a foreign, domestic, and economic perspective to record why, from where, and under what circumstances Hungarian refugees were forced to leave their homes.”⁵⁵

In its directive, *Decree No. 185/1945*, the Népgondozó Hivatal informed the legal authorities of their duties regarding refugees, including care, assistance, registration, and data reporting. Based on the rather sporadic data received from county authorities, it was clear that the number of refugees and expellees arriving from Czechoslovakia was steadily increasing. While in August 1945 there were 8 172 refugees expelled from Czechoslovakia, by December 1945 there were already 23 819, and by mid-1946 this number had risen to 32 866.

Table 1: Number of people expelled from Czechoslovakia and refugees.⁵⁶

	I. Citizens of the country concerned before 1938 (including family members)			II. Hungarian-born Hungarian citizens before 1938 (including family members)		
	31 August 1945	1 December 1945	15 June 1946	31 August 1945	1 December 1945	15 June 1946
Civil servants	716	2 365	2 770	2 713	9 943	8 891
Civilian refugees and deportees	2 097	5 739	13 628	2 646	5 772	7 577
Civil servants and civilian refugees together	2 813	8 104	16 398	5 359	15 715	16 468

On 17 September 1945, the Provisional National Government ordered the registration of all persons who had moved from the territory of neighbouring states to the territory of Hungary as it existed on 31 December 1937 for any reason, starting on 1 January 1938, and whose permanent residence was in one of those countries. The registration also included an inventory of the property

54 MNL OL, XIX-A-1-j 6774/1945, 13 August 1945.

55 MNL OL, XIX-A-1-j 3544/1945, Az utódállamokból menekült magyarok összeírása, 18 June 1945.

56 The table is compiled from the following sources: VASS 2007, p. 11; MNL OL, XIX-J-1-a-IV-72, 41091/Bé. /1945; Központi Statisztikai Hivatal Könyvtára (Library of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office; KSHK), *Thirring Lajos hagyatéka* (The Lajos Thirring Papers) regarding the most important results of the statistics of persons who moved to the current territory of Hungary since 1 January 1938. In *Kéziratok Statisztikai Közlemények LV*, 1946, Box 127, Budapest. “According to the records of the Hungarian Ministry of Social Welfare, 38 458 ‘refugees’ arrived in Hungary from Czechoslovakia before the signing of the population exchange agreement. The majority of these were the so-called *anyás* (those who were born in Trianon Hungary), while the rest were indigenous inhabitants of Slovakia.” VADKERTY 2001, p. 213. According to the Czechoslovak data, 31 780 Hungarians were forced to leave the territory of Slovakia in this manner by 1 July 1945. POPÉLY 2014, p. 36.

left behind by the person in question in the territory of the neighbouring states, as well as any damage suffered.⁵⁷ The Népgondozó Hivatal was responsible for organizing and carrying out the registration, but the Statistical Office was also involved in the preparatory work and processed the registration forms, publishing the first results of the census in the second half of 1946. It was noted that the census proceeded at a very slow pace due to the inefficiency of lower levels of administration and the negligence and indifference of those concerned. The most complete registration was carried out among the civil servants, because their salaries were made dependent on the submission of a registration form. Data on other groups of migrants are, therefore, incomplete:

A typical example is the trend in applications from Czechoslovak refugees. By the end of April 1946, 21 790 people who had moved from Czechoslovakia had been registered. In May, the Minister of the Interior issued a decree calling on people who were not registered yet to apply for registration in accordance with the implementation of the population exchange agreement. [...] The number of people who had relocated rose to 32 866 in the register at that time. In August, the Government Commissioner for Resettlement finally called on all those whose belongings had remained in Czechoslovakia to apply for entry permits in order to bring them home. [...] As a result, the number of registered Czechoslovak refugees increased to 40 918 with the new applicants.⁵⁸

However, it was clear that even after this, there were still many people who had moved from Czechoslovakia without any registration.

According to statistical data compiled in June 1946, a significant proportion of those who had moved from Czechoslovakia, 35.5% (11 661 people), were civil servants, while 64.5% (21 205 people) were private individuals. Of the civil servants, 76.2% (8 886 people) were persons who had been assigned to the re-annexed territory by the Hungarian state after November 1938. However, 23.8% (2 775 people) of the civil servants who moved to Hungary had lived there before the re-annexation and had been Czechoslovak citizens. More than one-third of the relocated individuals, 35.7% (7 570 people), were from the Trianon territory (motherland), while 64.3% (13 635 people) had previously been citizens of Czechoslovakia.⁵⁹

Summary

Towards the final stages of the Second World War, large numbers of ethnic Hungarians arrived in Hungary from neighbouring countries for a variety of reasons. Some of these individuals were civil servants who had been assigned by the Hungarian state to the re-annexed territories. However, a significant number of those who arrived had been born in the territory of the given country and had been citizens of that country even before the war. Fearing discrimination following the change of power and suffering various degrees of restriction of their civil rights and persecution, they fled to Hungary.

In the spring of 1945, the complete deprivation of the rights of German and Hungarian minorities was carried out on the basis of the principle of col-

⁵⁷ 8150/1945. ME. rendelet. In *Magyar Közlöny*, 20 September 1945, pp. 2–7.

⁵⁸ KSHK, *Thirring Lajos hagyatéka*.

⁵⁹ KSHK, *Thirring Lajos hagyatéka*.

lective punishment in Czechoslovakia. The leaders of the country had already formulated a demand for the removal of these two minority groups in the second half of the war.

Although the Hungarian government was aware from the outset of the persecution and disenfranchisement of Hungarians in Czechoslovakia, it failed to treat the problem with the seriousness it deserved for weeks. Any room for manoeuvre was severely limited by its restricted sovereignty and the lack of support from the great powers. Authorities could only take foreign policy measures through the ACC, which, led by Marshal Voroshilov, consistently ignored the protests of the Hungarian government regarding the situation of Hungarians in Czechoslovakia. Nor did it receive any help from the Western great powers. Although they did not contribute to the unilateral deportation of Hungarians, they did not support the establishment of an international commission of inquiry either. The weight of the protests of the Hungarian government was significantly reduced by the fact that the leadership itself had applied the principle of collective guilt to Germans in Hungary. Any argument that the treatment of the Hungarian and German minorities could not be linked was untenable.

In the deteriorating post-war economic situation, the Hungarian government also had great difficulty in finding jobs and providing housing for civil servants returning from the re-annexed territories. In addition, provisions for native Czechoslovak citizens posed an extraordinary challenge too. Providing humanitarian aid to refugees while also curbing mass migration to Hungary proved difficult.