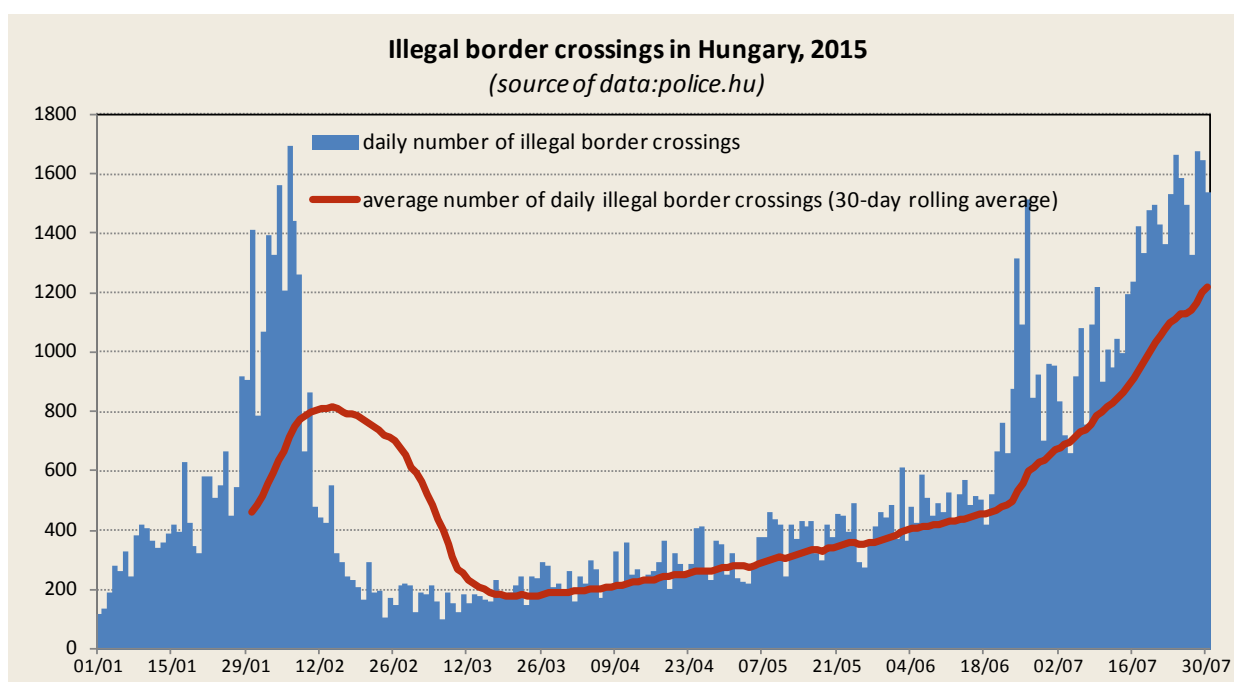
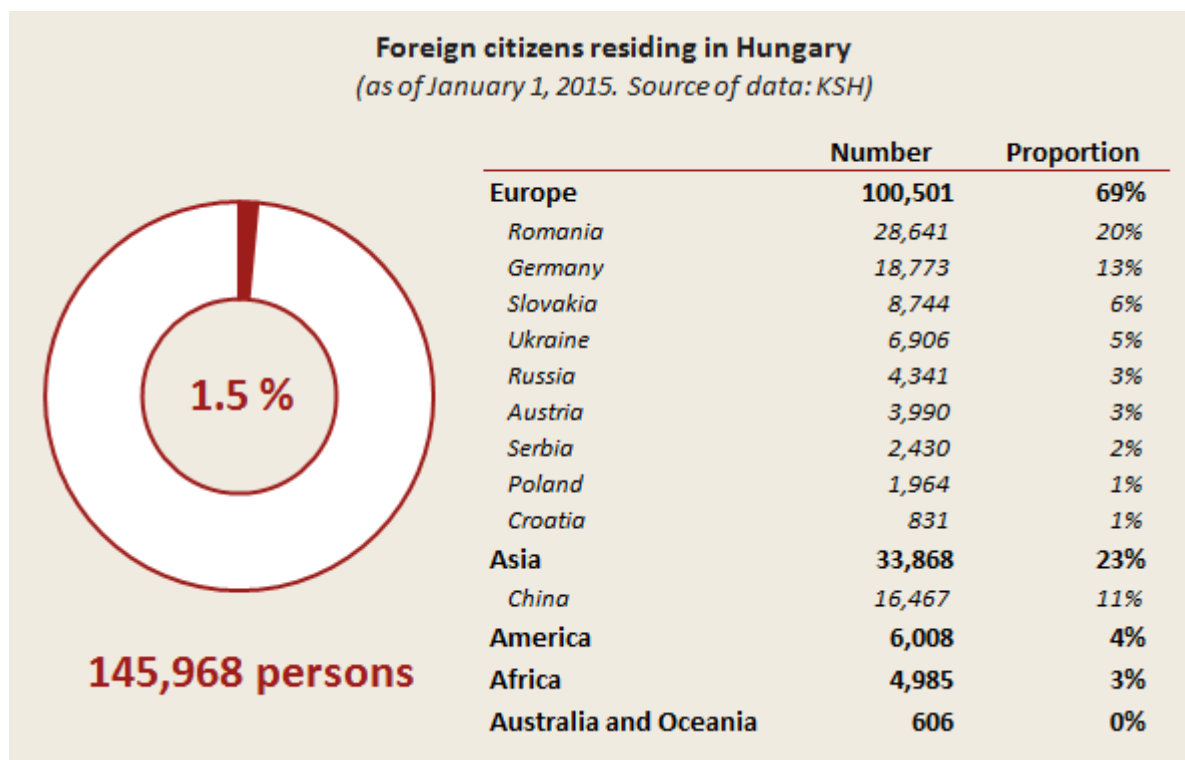


## The government's refugee campaign

- 1. Despite the fact that, based on the latest party preference survey, support for Fidesz has not increased since April, government politicians consider the government's anti-immigrant campaign a resounding success.** People in the administration and opinion-makers close to the government publicly talk about the campaign in glowing terms and in his recent speech in Tusnádfürdő Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán also talked about the purported success of Hungary's response to the challenge posed by global migration. All this says a lot about the mood that characterized the government prior to the refugee campaign. Since the fall of 2014 the governing coalition has been reeling under internal conflicts, corruption charges, and unpopular policy decisions, and now they have reason to believe that they have managed to recapture the political initiative and close ranks.
- 2. The refugee campaign is not simply a diversionary tactic or the unusual tussle with Jobbik; instead, it is a rearrangement of the political arena suiting Fidesz, i.e., part of its comprehensive political strategy.** The governing side has divided the political field to "national" and "anti-national" sides in an effort to discuss all issues along that fault line. Anyone trying to challenge Fidesz positions is automatically relegated to the anti-nationalist camp and becomes pro-immigrant. As the Prime Minister put it at Tusnádfürdő: *"Today, the Hungarian left [...] is ready to welcome illegal immigrants with open arms. These people, these politicians simply do not like Hungarians, and they do not like them because they are Hungarian."* By the end of 2014 domestic party politics climbed out of the trenches that served Fidesz so well. It became less and less credible that the Orbán-government is the only good steward of national interests. This is why the current wave of migration was a godsend for the governing party; with the campaign built on that issue the entire left opposition, anti-government civilians and rights groups can be portrayed as "pro-immigrant". And with this, from the government's point everything returned to normal.





**3. Regarding current migration trends, the government's campaign is based on two factors. One is the high number of asylum applications submitted in Hungary.** In this context, at the most recent EU-summit the Hungarian government pointed out correctly that so far EU officials have focused all their attention on Italy and Greece receiving seaborne migrants, and overlooked that Hungary is under significant pressure caused by overland migration. **The other factor is that the huge influx of refugees notwithstanding, one cannot talk about migration to Hungary.** While the government and the media adopting its terminology consistently talk about immigrants, in Hungary the government can afford to conduct such a campaign because the country barely has any immigrants and asylum seekers have no intention to stay for an extended period (according to KSH data, the proportion of foreign nationals in Hungary was only 1.5 per cent as of January 1, 2015, one-third of them are ethnic Hungarians from neighboring countries). For the most part, they submit applications merely for formal reasons only to accelerate their departure to Western and Northern Europe. At the same time, the government often expresses the fear that those migrating through Hungary will be returned by destination countries, even as to this day this fear has not been substantiated by facts on the ground or official statements, not to mention that expulsion procedures are rather complicated and are not the sole competence of the sending country.

**Number of immigrants, settled persons and persons whose stay surpasses a 3 months period**  
(as of December 31, 2014. Source of data: BMBAH)

<b>Immigration Permit</b>	<b>37528</b>
<b>Permanent Residence Permit</b>	<b>3655</b>
<b>Residence Permit</b>	<b>40269</b>

- 4. In fact, the risk of migrants being stranded in Hungary may come about if the Orbán-cabinet has its way and asylum policy is relegated to the exclusive competence of member states.** If the government continues to press this point, this will become its biggest challenge and not the fence-building project. If this were the case, Hungary, as a country located at the periphery of the EU, would take on the management of a global problem that represents a daunting task for the EU as a whole. For the same reason, it was a poor policy decision when the Hungarian government declined to handle a single asylum application as part of a voluntary quota system initiated in the EU. While even a symbolic commitment would have sufficed, the Hungarian government chose to show no solidarity with other member states, a gesture made even by Bulgaria, a country also treated as a special case. This policy may easily backfire and, in time of need, Hungary may not count on much solidarity from EU policy decision-makers. Moreover, the decision is also dangerous for Hungarians working abroad for, in David Cameron's Great Britain (often referred to by Orbán as a model) instead of immigrants coming from outside Europe, xenophobia is often directed at those arriving from Eastern Europe, I meaning that an anti-immigration policy may easily undermine free movement within the EU.
- 5. From a policy perspective, other aspects of the government's ideas about migration also appear to be hackneyed.** Even as the current wave of migration has swept aside all other issues, a Hungary characterized by poor demographic indicators, rising emigration, and intense xenophobia is in dire need of long-term strategic thinking. However, with its anti-immigration campaign launched in early 2015 the Orbán-cabinet has thrown out its own migration strategy adopted in 2013. Here I would point to three substantive issues abandoned by the government:
- “With effective communication the government (...) ensures that citizens receive reliable information on migration trends as to prevent the proliferation of prejudices tied to this issue”, and, “It must be prevented that some extremist groups use the public's lack of information to their own advantage and exploit a mass psychosis whipped up by xenophobia.” Compared to this, today the government fuels prejudice and encourages extremist discourse with its one-dimensional xenophobic communication.
  - “With special regard to the rising emigration of the Hungarian labor force from certain sectors, additional migrant workers will have to be admitted.” In contrast, today the government refers to migrants exclusively as people threatening Hungarian jobs. On a giant poster the message runs as follows: “If you come to Hungary, you cannot take our jobs”.
  - “... maintenance and development of a resettlement and transfer program (national resettlement and transfer program) based on international solidarity, including the program's annual scheduling and timely implementation”. In contrast, of all EU member states Hungary has been the only one refusing to resettle or transfer a single refugee.

Although this document showed a number of shortcomings at its inception, today the country has no migration strategy to speak of. Instead, the definition of national interest is limited to setting “foreign migrants” against “Hungarians”, and the promotion a false dichotomy between Hungarian and European Union interests.