

Tilos Rádió: „Magyarország, fáradtak vagyunk!”

Radio Programme on the situation of refugees, 2012, December 17.

Guests:

Ms Pardavi Márta, Co-Chair of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee (Helsinki)

Mr Ördögh István, Director of the Refugee Directorate of the Office of Immigration and Nationality (OIN)

Mr Hős Sándor, Director of the Bicske Reception Centre (Bicske Chief)

Mr Kováts András, Director of Menedék (Menedék)

Moderator: Kertész Anna (Moderator)

Moderator: The refugees went to protest in front of the Parliament, because they are tired and they have big problems. The first point from their Petition says that the refugees want free housing until they can support themselves.

This might sound too much to ask for, but actually we are only talking about 200 people per year. And the report of the UNHCR about Hungary in 2012 also said that refugees can easily become homeless. The refugees also wrote in the Petition, that the system to get the money support is too strict and it is hard to fulfill the conditions to get the money.

What is the opinion of the OIN about free housing demand and the strict conditions to get the support?

OIN: First of all, the housing problem of the Bicske refugees is solved temporarily. This means, that those people, who are in Bicske get free housing until end of March.

The people who leave Bicske can get maximum 170.000 Forints: this support is for the deposit of the flat that refugees want to rent. This 170.000 is also for the furniture of the flat that the refugees want to rent.

The refugees can also get around maximum 28.000 Forints per month after they move out from Bicske, this is for the regular housing support.

Because this money is from the state budget, the OIN has to check if this money support that they give to the refugees is really spent on housing or not. This is why the law says that OIN has to ask for a bill from the owner of the flat. This bill proves that the refugee spent the state-money on renting a flat. The OIN and everybody else knows, that the owners of flats do not want to give a bill to the person who rents the flats, so this bill-problem is a real living problem.

Moderator: How can the OIN stop or prevent refugees from becoming homeless?

OIN: in Western-European countries, where there are bigger refugee communities, this problem can be solved by the refugees themselves: 8-10 people can go in the same flat. Even if this is not housing according to human rights, this is still something.

(some part is missing here)

Menedék: The money support system which should help the refugees cannot be used by most of the refugees. This money support is not enough for most of the refugees. The problem is not that there are only a few refugees who think that this money is not enough. The problem is, that this money is not enough for most of the refugees.

There will always be refugees who want to leave Hungary, and these refugees will find enough money to buy plane tickets to leave Hungary, nobody will be able to stop them. The real question is: what to do when 80-120 people say that the support from the state is not enough?

There is this new study from the OIN on the integration of refugees. How many refugees did the OIN ask in this study?

OIN: the OIN found 1900 refugees with active registered addresses in the Address Registry. The OIN went to 400 flats and the OIN interviewed 120 people. The majority of

these 120 people were refugees with families, because the OIN could find the refugee-families more at home than single refugees.

Those refugees who were not found by the OIN probably changed their address and did not tell OIN that they had changed their address.

Menedék: Yes, so it is important, that only a very few refugees were found by the OIN. This group which was found does not represent all of the refugees in Hungary. This group of refugees is only a special group of refugees: the successful ones.

OIN: Yes, that's right.

Menedék: This study by OIN is only writing about 20% of the refugees, and does not say anything about 80% of the refugees. This study cannot answer important questions:

Why can we not find most of the refugees in Hungary?

Where are these refugees, who we cannot find?

And the most important question: Why are they left out?

Does Hungary (the state) say that Hungary only cares about the successful group of refugees? Because this is what we can see in the answer to the Petition of the refugees from the Ministry of Interior: that refugees can get a lot of things from the state and if the refugees cannot use this support from the state, the state will not do anything more for the refugees.

OIN: We have to see that the integration is a two-sided process: not only the state has obligation to give support to the refugees, but the refugees also have to show some results to the state. The state should not support those refugees who do not want to integrate in Hungary.

We have to see that there are refugees who after they arrive in Hungary say that they do not want to stay in Hungary, because they want to go to Sweden or Germany. They say this because maybe they have relatives in Sweden or Germany. I can understand this, because this is a human feeling to join your family members in Hungary. If I were a refugee, I would do the same if I had family members in another country. But these people do not want to integrate in Hungary.

About the study of the 120 refugees: it is already a success for us, that we have found refugees at home. It is only another question in what level of integration did we find those refugees. And there were big differences between those 120 refugees we have found: there were families living in the 8th district in poor conditions, and richer families living in the 11th district in good neighbourhoods.

We want to see what characteristics are important in the integration of refugees. Is it true that if somebody arrived in Hungary with better education, than that refugee is better integrated into the Hungarian society? We do not know yet. But we see one thing from the study: it does not matter how well a refugee can speak Hungarian: maybe the refugee does not speak Hungarian and is still here in Hungary and can still support himself/herself.

And this is important to know, because some of the money-support that the state gives to refugees is based on the number of Hungarian classes the refugee went to.

We have to see that Western-European countries also do this: if the refugees in Western-European countries do not go to enough language classes in these Western-European countries, than those refugees living in these Western-European countries will be sanctioned and will not get money support from the state. So this is not a Hungarian invention to say that refugees have to attend the Hungarian classes and the cultural orientation classes to be able to get money.

But this study seems to show that if a refugee does not speak the Hungarian language, this refugee can still support herself/himself. And this means, that there is room for discussion here how to change these integration rules and the support-system.

Maybe it is a better idea to give more support to refugees in their first time in Hungary, and little less after some years. Maybe this is better than giving little support for more years which is only enough to survive.

The housing-problem could be solved with better cooperation with the local governments in Hungary.

The OIN knows that Western-European countries, like Germany have better social housing systems. This means, that when a refugee gets the status, the refugee can go to a flat which is sponsored by the state. But Hungary is different, we don't have the social housing system here.

Moderator: What is the biggest problem for refugees in Hungary?

OIN: to get a job. It is the most important, because a job can make a refugee self-supportive.

Menedék: yes, the job is important, but we should see, that most of the refugees don't have access to normal jobs on the open job market. Most of the refugees in Hungary can only get a job in the „ethnic economy”, which means that Afghans or Turkish refugees can almost only find jobs in Afghan or Turkish communities in Hungary. Which means that they can only become a worker in a kebab-shop or something like this. And in the ethnic-economy, the refugees have to work 7 days per week, 12-14 hours per day. So this is a cruel segment of the job market, refugees can only destroy themselves with these jobs.

When a refugee wants to find a job on the open job market, they will face hard conditions to fulfill: they have to speak Hungarian, or other European languages or the refugees have to have special competency or special profession, which is hard to get for refugees.

2-3 years ago it was much easier for a refugee to get a job in Hungary. But then, the economical crises came, and lots of Hungarians became unemployed, jobless. And it is much harder for a refugee to get a job than for an unemployed Hungarian.

I don't agree to give free housing for refugees. We should see how much time does a refugee need to be able to support herself/himself.

It would be a good idea to make it easier for employers (people who can give jobs to refugees) to give job to refugees. The state can decide to give better conditions to employers to employ refugees. This means, that the state would not give more money to refugees directly, but the state would give a bigger chance for refugees to find a job.

But until a refugee is in such a disadvantageous situation, how can we expect the employers to give jobs to the refugees?

Moderator: there are refugees, who do not want to stay in Hungary and integrate here. But there are refugees who want to stay in Hungary and integrate here. The refugees who protested at the Parliament also want to integrate here, that's why they wrote their Petition to the Government.

And they had very clear demands: more flexible conditions to get money from the state, better health care, more social workers in Bicske and so on. What can the Chief of Bicske, Hős Sándor say about these demands?

Bicske Chief: the social workers organise the ID card, the address card, the health insurance card for the refugees.

When the refugees go to Bicske, they sign a cooperation agreement with the OIN. In this agreement they agree to go to Hungarian classes. So they have to keep this agreement, or if they don't keep this, they will not get the money support.

The refugees also get cultural-orientation classes in Hungary: they can get to know the culture of Hungary.

The social workers also show the refugees how to pay a bill at the post office. The social workers go to the Okmányiroda with refugees to show how to organise their things.

The refugees get warm accommodation in Bicske with electricity and 24-hour hot water supply. The refugees get 6500 HUF/person for food, and 7125 HUF/person/month which is the pocket money.

A family of 4 people with all this money, including the money they get after their children can have net 160-180.000 HUF/month. And their accommodation is for free in Bicske. This money should be enough for them to prepare for the time after Bicske.

Usually people can stay for 6 months, but for families, it is harder to prepare for the time after Bicske, so they usually stay for 1 year.

One refugee told me (Hós) some days ago, that if a refugee really wants to find a job, they will find a job.

To find a flat after Bicske is not easy, but the social workers in Bicske are constantly looking for flats for the refugees. And of course, it is hard to find a flat where the flat-owner would give a bill.

Moderator: So what happens to those refugees, who do not have a job or a place to stay when they have to leave Bicske?

Bicske Chief: we help them when the refugees move out: even I helped a family of 3 Iraqi refugees with my own car to move to Budapest into their flat. Now, the refugees do not have to move out from Bicske until end of March. I want to remind everybody, that we do not put people to the street from Bicske.

The refugees can also get this 28500 HUF per month, but they have to attend the Hungarian classes for this.

There is also a good cooperation with the local work center. This work center checks the competency of the refugees.

Helsinki: I think that the refugees went to protest to the Parliament, because they are desperate and they do not see a good future. The refugees have a right to integration and of course, they have a right to have a protest. This protest is also good for the mental health of refugees. It is good that the refugees are standing up for their rights.

Studies show, that refugees who leave their dangerous countries are progressive people who are not hopeless. But they have suffered big traumas in their countries, and the Hungarian reality is also hard for them. We need to give them inspiration and motivation.

If the family of the refugee is here in Hungary with the refugee, it is a very good motivation for the refugees to integrate. And it is huge problem, that people with the 5 years status (oltalmazott) can only bring their families to Hungary if they have a lot of money. This is really bad, and this makes the refugees' situation even harder.

Moderator: What is the reason, why the refugees with 5 years protection cannot bring their family members to Hungary like refugees with full protection?

Helsinki-Menedék: Yes, we also want to know this from the OIN. Especially because 2 years ago, the refugees with the full protection, and people with the 5 years status could bring their family members to Hungary with the same easier conditions. And both groups have the same problems in any European country, so they should have the same rights.

OIN: in the European Union, there is no law which says that people with the 5 years status have the right to bring their family members with the same easier conditions like people with the full protection.

Helsinki: But what is the OIN's opinion about this? Should refugees with the 5 years status bring their family members to Hungary with the same easier conditions like refugees with the full protection? Or it is good like the way it is now?

OIN: I cannot answer. This was a political decision from the Parliament. The OIN is only an executive office, which does not make the laws.

And I have to say, that there are refugees in countries, who abuse the right for family reunification. For example there are people who don't say during their asylum-interview that they have any family members. But after they get the refugee status, they say that they have family members.

Or there was a DNS-study in Sweden: the Swedish authorities could check if the family members of refugees are really the relatives of the refugees, or not. And the study proved, that 90% of the „family members“ of refugees were in reality not the family members of refugees, because they were not even relatives of the refugees.

So we have to be careful.

Menedék: but it is much worse to simply say in general that the refugees with 5 years protection cannot bring their family members to Hungary with easier conditions, and only if they have a lot of money. It is much worse to generally say no to a group of people. It is much better to examine every single case, even with DNS-tests.

Of course we understand, that the OIN does not make the laws. But OIN has a right to propose a law.

Bicske Chief: but Menedék was also there to propose a law.

Menedék: no, the NGO's (like Menedék, or Helsinki) only have the right to give an opinion about a law. So far, Menedék at least got the proposed laws from the Ministries, so that Menedék could at least give their opinion about a proposed law. But the last proposed laws by the Ministries were not even sent to Menedék.

And as a professional expert in the refugee field, I (Kováts) have to say, that in my opinion, it is bad to take away the right for easier family reunification from the refugees with 5 years protection. And I don't accept this answer which OIN, or the Ministry of Interior gives: that „because no European Union law orders Hungary to give these easier rights to refugees with 5 years protection, Hungary doesn't have to do it, so Hungary doesn't do it“.

I'm happy by the way that there are fields where Hungary actually pays attention to laws of the European Union, I wish Hungary would pay more attention to EU laws also in other fields.

But I would like to hear reasons which have content, which are professional reasons. Between 2007-2010, we had 3 years, when the refugees with 5 years protection also had the same easier rights to bring their family to Hungary as refugees with the full protection. From 2010, we already have 2 years of experience when refugees with the 5 years protection can only bring their family members to Hungary if they have a lot of money. Why is this?

OIN: I cannot tell you, because this is not my field. The family reunification of any people belongs to the Alien Policing Directorate of the OIN.

Menedék: people with the 5 years protection should have the same easier rights to bring their family members to Hungary. The humanitarian protection of refugees with the full protection and refugees with the 5 years should be in general the same, with the important rights being the same.

Chief of Bicske: we should not forget, that 98% of the people are coming to Hungary without any papers, and the OIN gives them a status even if these people do not have any papers.

OIN: this question about the family reunification of the people with the 5 years protection is not a fair question. I do not deal with family reunification cases, because these cases are Alien Policing cases, you should ask them. They can tell you how many people could bring their family members to Hungary and what is the process to do it.

Menedék: I am only interested in your professional opinion on this issue. Some questions before, you seemed to have professional opinion on other issues, like the housing of refugees. Where did those professional opinions come from?

OIN: We had that study with the refugees. But I don't know about any study regarding family reunification of refugees or people with the 5 years protection.

Chief of Bicske: yes, and the NGO's can freely speak what they want, but we, the representatives of the state cannot say freely what we want.

Menedék: I just want you to tell your opinion on this. We had 3 years when family reunification was also easy for people with the 5 years protection. Now, since 2 years, it is not easier any more. What is better in your professional point of view? The housing or the job-market of refugees is a complex question. But the family reunification is not a complex question. And this is not a political question, but a clearly professional question.

Helsinki: there is an Integration Book of Refugees made by the European Union. This book also says that people with the full refugee protection and people with the 5 years protection should have very similar rights. I know that the OIN is making a strategy for the integration of refugees. I would be very happy if the family reunification of the people with the 5 years protection could also be discussed there.

OIN: the Ministry of Interior is making an integration strategy for migrants in general. And the integration strategy of refugees will be part of that. The Helsinki-people have mentioned the issue of the family reunification with the people with 5 years protection already in the OIN 2 weeks ago. Of course we know about this issue, we have known about this issue since years.

We have a hard job, because the refugees always ask for more, and we always get criticism from the NGO's. And somebody from the Ministry of Interior should also be here, I am not enough to answer these questions alone with my colleague from Bicske (Hős).

Moderator: I would like to give positive feedback to the OIN, because usually we invite people from the state, but nobody comes, but at least you came from the OIN. This is really good, because these discussions should always involve people working for the state. So thank you for coming and I think you are doing a good job in answering the questions.

Bicske Chief: there is a family who could take part in an integration programme in Győr-Moson-Sopron county, this refugee family moved to a house in this village, and the whole village loves them. There will be another family from January 2013 who will move to another village from Bicske with this integration programme. This should be the future.

Helsinki: it is very important to have and show successful stories of refugees. This week for example, there was a successful family reunification story of an Afghan boy. He came here without his parents, he was only 16 years old. His family could join him 4 years later. This was a lot of work from the lawyers of the Helsinki Committee to get a positive decision from the courts. So it is important to show these good examples when it is worth to suffer, because it can be good at the end. But if nobody can succeed around me, then of course I would also leave this country.

Moderator: let's speak about the new laws on asylum in Hungary. These will become valid from 2013 January.

OIN: yes, two main changes: from now on, if somebody asks for asylum in Hungary, and then goes to another EU country without waiting for their decision in Hungary, and then

will be returned to Hungary with the Dublin-regulations, this asylum-seeker can continue her/his asylum process as the first asylum-process.
And the other change is that if somebody asks for asylum after he/she meets the authorities, this person will not get an expulsion decision, and this means, that this person will not go to prison (immigration detention centre).

Helsinki-Menedék: we are happy for these changes.

Helsinki: we have criticised these for years now, so it's good that at least these 2 problems are solved now. But there are many other problems still on the list.

Moderator: for example which problems?

Helsinki: family reunification, problems of unaccompanied minors (refugee children without parents), the problem of getting citizenship for refugees or people with the 5 years protection, integration of refugees.