

Representation of Refugees, Asylum-Seekers and Refugee Affairs In Hungarian Dailies

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Abstract. How does the press in Hungary write about refugees, asylum-seekers and refugee affairs? We sought to answer this question. Articles appearing in 2005 and 2006 in two leading national Hungarian dailies were examined with quantitative content analysis. The results show that the articles analyzed often treat refugee affairs as an “official” political matter. The high proportion of legislation and political positions conveys the image that refugee affairs are a state or intergovernmental matter, an “official”, legal, political issue rather than for example a humanitarian question. Most of the articles published in both papers write about problems and conflicts in connection with refugee affairs. The negative media image has different significance for different topics. We argue that the question of refugee affairs is a topic where the image shown by the media is of great relevance: the media can be a more important source of information on this subject than personal contacts.

Keywords: *refugee, asylum seeker, refugee affairs, Hungary, press, media analysis, content analysis*

The concept of international migration attracts special attention not only from the social sciences. Demography, cultural anthropology, economics, jurisprudence and their related disciplines, as well as the approaches arising from the combination of these sciences are all producing a mass of theories and research on the subject. There is no uniform, comprehensive theory of international migration, instead a predominance of middle-range theories is found in this area. These largely arose independently of each other, some of them as an answer to specific empirical research problems. “However, the patterns and trends appearing in immigration indicate that we cannot draw on the tools of any one single discipline for an understanding of the present

migration process or concentrate our analysis on only a single level" (Massey et. al. 2001:9).

Within the broad topic of migration, our 2005-2006 research project focused on the question of Hungarian refugee affairs. The different research blocks applied different social scientific approaches (economics, sociology, psychology, jurisprudence) and consequently also used differing methods. As a result, our research can be regarded as interdisciplinary. An element of the research project was a press analysis. It examined how refugee affairs, refugees and asylum-seekers are represented in the Hungarian press ¹. We present the results of the media analysis in this article.

We stress two closely related characteristics of the role played by Hungary in international migration – from the viewpoint of our theme – which underline the justification for our analysis. One is the high level even by international comparison of xenophobia present in Hungarian society, a fact long known to sociologists (Czene 2002; Enyedi, Fábíán & Sík 2004), and the other, a fact known to both demographers and experts dealing with refugee affairs, is that Hungary is a transit country for asylum seekers which partly explains why the number of asylum seekers and refugees in the country is low in comparison, for example, to countries of Western Europe. Because of the low proportion within the Hungarian population of persons involved in refugee affairs, the media are the main source of information for the general public on refugee affairs. In this way the existing high level of xenophobia and the low level of personal social interactions with refugees both confirm the importance of getting to know the image of refugee affairs in the Hungarian press.

In the course of the media analysis we examined two leading national Hungarian dailies (*Népszabadság*, *Magyar Nemzet*). Our analysis examined what image the articles appearing in the dailies convey of the question. Articles

¹ The research on "Independently-with equal opportunities" was conducted under the "N.E.E.D.S. Network, Education, Employment, (Anti)Discrimination, Socialisation" EQUAL Program in the implementation stage of the "Support for the social and labour market integration of asylum seekers" action. It was co-ordinated by the KROLIFY Opinion and Organisation Research Institute. The authors wish to express their gratitude to Judit Pál who selected the articles and Petra Arnold who helped in the elaboration of code commands and the final selection of articles and also made valuable observations on the analysis. Thanks are also due to Brigitta Font who participated in the elaboration of earlier versions of the analysis and to András Kováts and Zoltán Klenner for useful comments on earlier versions of this article.

appearing in the course of 2005 and 2006 formed the basis of our investigation. We used the method of quantitative content analysis to examine the articles².

The representation of refugee affairs in the media

A great deal of research has been carried out on the media and on its representation of minorities. For the most part the various Hungarian and foreign studies have reached similar conclusions: the media usually present minorities in a stereotyped way and in connection with negative topics (Vicsek, 1997; Terestyéni, 2004; Ligeti, 2007; Hargreaves, 1995; van Dijk, 1991; Finney & Robinson, 2007). Moreover, the coverage of minorities can be linked mainly to a few topics, such as immigration, crime, cultural differences and ethnic/race relations (Finney – Robinson 2007).

Less research has been done specifically in connection with the topic of migration and refugee affairs, and most of what has been done is the work of British and American researchers. Foreign investigations have found that in most cases the media present immigration and the existence of asylum as a problem or something threatening the host country. As a result the key themes are restricting the rights of immigrants, the burden on the welfare state and the dishonesty of the migrants. Bach found that the media focus more on conflicts than on ethnic harmony; and they rarely obtain information from members of the ethnic minorities. The British media often use certain words and expressions – generally having a negative connotation – in connection with asylum seekers, such as flood, wave, bogus, cheat (Finney – Robinson 2007, Tait et al. 2004). Typically British reports on asylum seekers do not mention why the asylum seekers go to the United Kingdom or the circumstances in which they travel and live, and rarely allow persons involved in refugee affairs to speak for themselves (Philo - Beattie 1999, Finney – Robinson 2007).

At the same time some researchers have shown that there are papers which paint a more positive picture of persons involved in refugee affairs, writing about them in the first person plural and regarding them as part of the local community. Finney and Robinson (2007) compared the refugee image in two

² The present article contains part of the results of our quantitative content analysis. We also performed qualitative text analysis, but the results of that analysis are not presented in this article.

British local papers and found that one presents a more positive picture of refugees, interviews them more often and treats them as part of the community. Other research projects also found that a more balanced treatment is more likely to be found among the local papers with more precise reports about refugees, while the national dailies tend to use more hostile language. Nevertheless many local papers also paint a largely negative picture of refugees and asylum seekers (Speers 2001).

One of the modes of treatment found in the dailies is to present the topic of refugee affairs as an official matter. An analysis examining Welsh media in 2000, for example, found that the Welsh media used a less hostile tone than the British national press in articles on refugees and asylum seekers, but approached topics related to them as “official” matters. Refugees and asylum seekers are treated as figures: financial costs, statistics. There are very few articles about why people seek asylum. As a result asylum seekers are given little opportunity to express their opinions or tell their own stories (Speers 2001). Another factor potentially influencing the representation of refugee affairs in the press is whether an article appears in a political paper or a tabloid, in what region of the given country, in a liberal or conservative paper (Van Gorp 2005).

A research project prepared and conducted by the Kurt Lewin Foundation and three foreign research institutes examined the representation in the media of minorities, immigrants and refugees in four countries. The print and visual media in Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary over a period of one month in 2006 were examined, largely using the methods of qualitative content analysis. Although articles on immigrants and refugees made up only a tiny proportion of the research material because the media dealt mainly with the topic of minorities, we nevertheless consider it relevant to present here a few of their findings. The investigation of the print press revealed a striking difference between the press organs of Hungary and of the three other countries. In the latter three countries the dividing line was between the tabloid press and the quality papers, while in Hungary it lies between the left-wing and the right-wing press. They found that the Hungarian right-wing daily *Magyar Nemzet* prints articles reflecting a strong preconception, mainly regarding Gypsies but also on other minorities. A good example of this is that it declared the lack of civilisation among the Gypsies to be the cause of the incident in Olaszliszka, referred to the

Slovaks by the derogatory term “tót” and to the Germans in Hungary as “sváb”, as though to evoke nostalgia for the Hungary of the pre-war years (Ligeti 2007).

Éva Kovács and Borbála Kriza (2004) examined the press representation in three different years – 1945, 1990 and 2000 – using quantitative methods. They analysed the articles on foreigners and minorities appearing in six Hungarian papers (both weeklies and dailies). They found that the papers devoted insignificant attention to the question of refugees, especially in the years 1990 and 2000³.

The research

Methodology of the research

We analysed all articles from the print versions of *Népszabadság* and *Magyar Nemzet* between January 1, 2005 and December 31, 2006⁴, that met the following three criteria:

1. The article included one of the expressions from refugee affairs or migration affairs from the list compiled by us⁵;
2. Its content is connected to the question of refugee affairs⁶.

³ Although, unlike the Kurt Lewin Foundation they examined the press material of a whole year not just a month, they took samples from the issues published. As a result, the number of articles in the sample dealing specifically with refugees is very small, especially for the years 1990 and 2000.

⁴ The selection was made on the basis of search words – in the online database of *Magyar Nemzet*, and in the *Népszabadság* (not online) database that can only be used on the spot. We then selected articles that appeared in the print versions of the two papers.

⁵ The migration affairs expressions were included among the search words because it happened in many cases that the author used a migration affairs expression when, in fact, he/she actually meant a person involved in refugee affairs, for example, calling asylum seekers illegal immigrants. This same inappropriate or imprecise use of expressions also characterises everyday speech. If terms from migration affairs had not been included among the search words, articles concerning the theme of refugee affairs but referring to persons in refugee affairs with migration affairs or other expressions would not have been included in the population studied and so the validity of the research would have been reduced.

⁶ Articles with a content that placed them in the focus of the research formed the object of the analysis. Articles not touching on the theme but containing one of the above refugee affairs or migrant affairs expressions as an adjective or phrase, such as “*People practically fled from Pest at the weekend*”, “*The shopping centre is a real refuge*”, etc. were not included in the population examined. Nor did we include articles about persons who fled

3. It discusses refugee affairs in more than one sentence.

In Hungary an imprecise use of concepts related to refugee affairs can be observed in common usage. In this article we use the legal meaning of the concepts; in the course of the investigation we defined the main concepts used in the investigation on the basis of the Hungarian legislation (Act No. CXXXIX of 1997 on Asylum, Government Decree No. 172/2001. (IX. 26.), Kalmár 2001)⁷.

Applying the above criteria, we found 149 articles; these formed the object of the analysis. The data were analysed by quantitative content analysis (Krippendorf 1995). The papers analysed are two major national Hungarian dailies. *Népszabadság* is generally more left wing in its political orientation, while *Magyar Nemzet* is a right-wing, conservative paper.

Results of the Research

Number of articles and their distribution over time

A total of 149 articles in the two papers touched on the subject of refugee affairs. We estimated that in the period concerned a total of roughly 130,000 articles appeared in the newspapers examined. It can be seen that only a tiny percentage of the articles dealt with the question of refugee affairs. This can be explained in part by the narrow definition of the theme: we included in the analysis only those articles that touched on the theme in more than one sentence and we took the legal concept of refugee affairs as our basis (the number of publications examined would have been greater if we had included among the articles analysed, for example those dealing with persons fleeing from natural catastrophes)⁸. Partly it is also obviously due to the fact that the number of articles which appeared on the topic of refugee affairs is very small in both papers: in 2005 and 2006 only a few articles touched on the theme of

from the given country because of a natural catastrophe (or stayed in the country in camps set up for them).

⁷ For the process of the refugee affairs procedure, see, http://www.bmbah.hu/ugyintezes_eljarasrend.php?id=30, accessed on March 16, 2007.

⁸ The choice of a narrow theme – using the legal meaning of refugee affairs – for the present research was determined by the aims of the broader EQUAL project within the frames of which our investigation was carried out.

refugee affairs. If we compare the percentage of the articles with the results of other research projects, we find that it is typical not only in Hungary but also in other countries that only a tiny percentage touch on the subject (Tait et al, 2004; Speers, 2001). Of the two daily papers examined, Népszabadság published more articles on the subject than Magyar Nemzet, and more articles appeared in 2005 than in 2006.

Table 1: Number of articles dealing with refugee affairs in the two dailies in 2005 and 2006

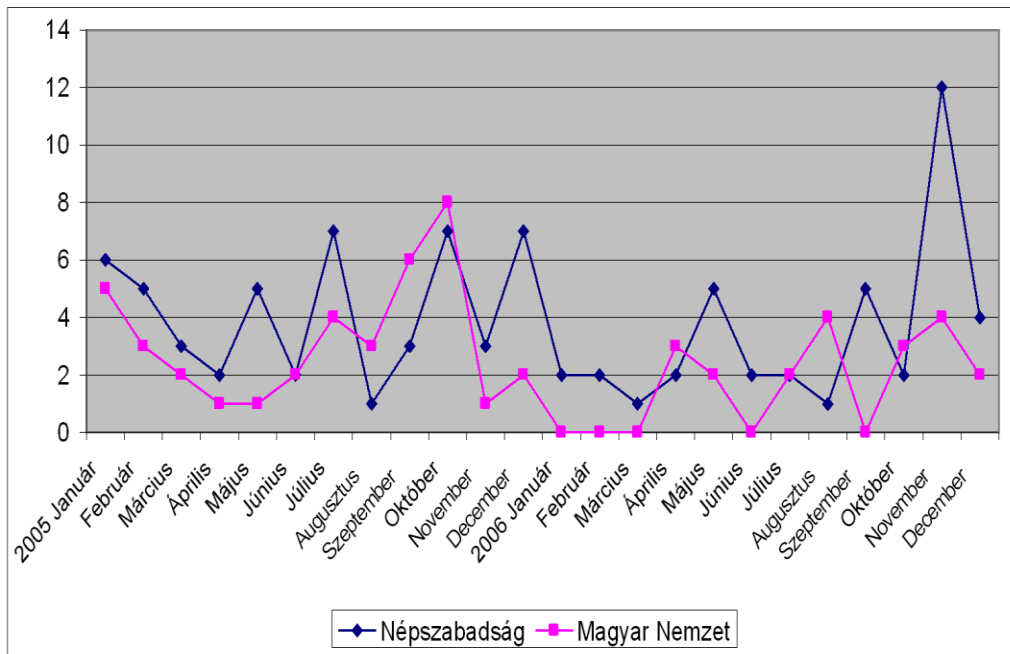
	Year of publication				Total	
	2005		2006		Number of articles	%
	Number of articles	% (N=89)	Number of articles	% (N=60)		
Magyar Nemzet	38	42.7%	20	33.3%	58	38.9%
Népszabadság	51	57.3%	40	66.7%	91	61.1%
Total	89	100.0%	60	100.0%	149	100.0%

The distribution of the articles – shown in the diagram below – is related to various events covered in the press. In January 2005 a new centre for the reception of foreign minors was opened in Nagykanizsa and the question of stricter immigration laws arose in the run-up to the elections in Great Britain. In July the revolution in Uzbekistan broke out. When Uzbek refugees “filled” the refugee camps in neighbouring Kyrgyzia, they were transported to Romania. Also in July large numbers of Roma from Slovakia sought asylum in the Czech Republic. Many articles appeared in October when the struggles around the two Spanish cities in Africa, Melilla és Ceuta, were the most embittered. Asylum-seekers “attacked” the high walls around the two cities to submit their applications for asylum in territory under European jurisdiction.

In 2006 two main themes dominated the Hungarian print press in connection with refugee affairs. One was the anniversary of the 1956 revolution; a number of articles appeared in connection with Hungarian refugees at that time. Another major theme was the travel to Sweden by Roma families from Baranya and Tolna Counties. They took economy flights to Malmö in Sweden to submit applications for asylum. Népszabadság discussed the

exodus of Roma families to Sweden in far more articles than Magyar Nemzet. In contrast the latter paper carried more articles than Népszabadság in the autumn months on refugee affairs in connection with the 1956 revolution in Hungary.

Figure 1: Monthly distribution of the articles (frequencies)



General characteristics of the content of the articles

The second table shows the countries appearing in the articles on refugee affairs in the two papers. It can be seen that in both cases a substantial percentage of the articles write about Hungary and the EU member countries.

Around a quarter of the articles in both papers mention Hungary as country of destination. Hungary also figured in the news as a country of origin; most of the articles in this category dealt with the exodus of Romas to Sweden and with the 1956 refugees. The most frequently mentioned countries of destination are EU member countries other than Hungary (there are 86 such articles in the newspapers).

Table 2: Countries discussed in the articles

	Newspaper			
	Magyar Nemzet		Népszabadság	
	Number of articles	% ⁹ (N=58)	Number of articles	% (N=91)
The article writes (also) in general, not (only) specifically	3	5.2%	6	6.6%
Writes (also) about the EU situation in general, not (only) about the situation in specifically	10	17.2%	9	9.9%
Hungary as... country of origin	9	15.5%	18	19.8%
transit country	2	3.4%	6	6.6%
destination	13	22.4%	22	24.2%
EU country / country of origin	1	1.7%	1	1.1%
countries transit country	2	3.4%	4	4.4%
except destination	33	56.9%	53	58.2%
Hungary as... Non-EU country of origin	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
developed transit country	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
country as... destination	6	10.3%	13	14.3%
Non-EU country of origin	8	13.8%	19	20.9%
developing transit country	0	0.0%	2	2.2%
country as ... destination	0	0.0%	5	5.5%

We examined the themes that appear in the articles.

Taking into account all the themes, law and politics appear most frequently in the articles on refugee affairs, followed by crime/deviant behaviour. These are followed by the labour market, and questions of financial situation/aid.

⁹ Several countries may have appeared in the articles and in more than one way. For this reason, the figures given in the percentage column add up to more than 100%.

Laws, regulations and political positions on refugee affairs occur as a theme in more than half of the articles (in 80), indicating that to a considerable extent journalists regard questions touching on refugees and asylum-seekers to be legal, political, “official” themes. This result is in line with the finding of an earlier research analysing the contents of Welsh newspapers.

That investigation also found that the media treat questions related to refugees and asylum-seekers as “official” affairs (Speers, 2001). These articles discussed the activities of political parties and touched on questions concerning the immigration policy of different countries or the EU (efforts to make changes/amendments, generally with restrictions), and intergovernmental talks on refugee affairs.

There were frequent references to different laws and regulations. Specifically the authors mentioned the Geneva convention (the criteria for obtaining refugee status) and the Dublin agreement (which states that the refugee affairs procedure must be conducted in the EU member state where the asylum-seeker first applied for refugee status). The other references to regulations were made in general terms (for example, “under the regulations in force”¹⁰).

The theme of crime/deviant behaviour occurred with a very high (38%) incidence. A considerable part of the coverage falling in this category was about the asylum-seekers rushing on Melilla and Ceuta, the two Spanish cities in Africa, the soldiers attacking them with rubber bullets and their expulsion in buses. Some reports wrote about local disturbances that broke out either between local residents and immigrants or between two different ethnic groups.

The high incidence of the themes of crime and deviance is in line with the results of British research by Tait et al., where expressions such as “horde”, “rabble” clearly referring to deviant behaviour were frequently found in articles on refugee affairs (Tait et al, 2004). A comparison of Magyar Nemzet and Népszabadság shows that the conservative Magyar Nemzet more often touches on the question of deviant behaviour in connection with the theme of refugee affairs.

¹⁰ Esélyprogram menekülteknek [Chance programme for refugees], Népszabadság, April 9, 2005. p. 7.

Table 3: Themes occurring in the articles

	Newspaper				Total	
	Magyar Nemzet		Népszabadság		Number of articles	% (N=149)
	Number of articles	% ¹¹ (N=58)	Number of articles	% (N=91)		
Law, politics	31	53.4%	49	53.8%	80	53.7%
Crime, deviant behaviour	25	43.1%	30	33.0%	55	36.9%
Labour market situation, economic activity	12	20.7%	22	24.2%	34	22.8%
Financial situation, support, aid	10	17.2%	23	25.3%	33	22.1%
Demography, population	8	13.8%	16	17.6%	24	16.1%
Situation of receiving station, hostel, refugee camp	7	12.1%	15	16.5%	22	14.8%
Individual case, life history	4	6.9%	16	17.6%	20	13.4%
Relations formed with host society, integration	5	8.6%	14	15.4%	19	12.8%
Catastrophe, scandal	6	10.3%	4	4.4%	10	6.7%
School, education, courses	3	5.2%	11	12.1%	14	9.4%
Housing affairs, homeless affairs	5	8.6%	4	4.4%	9	6.0%
Health status	3	5.2%	6	6.6%	9	6.0%
Art, culture, book	5	8.6%	2	2.2%	7	4.7%

¹¹ Several themes may appear in individual articles. For this reason the percentage figures given in the table add up to more than 100%.

The themes of labour market situation and financial situation/aid appear somewhat less frequently, in around one quarter of the articles. These themes are present with much greater emphasis in articles published in 2006 than in 2005 (while barely 8% of the articles wrote about the labour market situation in 2005, in 2006 45% discussed the labour market situation; just over 10% of the articles in 2005 touched on the financial situation compared to 40% in 2006). These themes appeared frequently in the 2006 articles on the Roma families who migrated to Sweden as the writers often mentioned that the family members concerned submitted their applications for asylum status in Sweden because they could not find work in Hungary. Another frequent theme in these articles was that people receiving social aid could live on a higher standard in Sweden than in Hungary.

We were able to classify 85% of the articles analysed into our typology containing different points in time (we were able to determine the time dimension to which the article referred in a higher proportion of articles in Magyar Nemzet than in the case of Népszabadság). The present dimension dominates in the writings in both papers (115 articles deal with the present). Some of the references to the past contain recent data on the number of persons seeking and obtaining asylum in the different EU member states. Also placed in this time dimension are articles on the life history of one or more persons involved in refugee affairs. A considerable proportion of the writings also dealing with the past touched on the question of refugee affairs in connection with the 1956 revolution. The presentation of life histories was more typical of Népszabadság, while discussion of 1956 was found more in Magyar Nemzet. Articles on the future most often deal with changes in the EU's immigration policy or restrictions in the regulations applying to refugee affairs or foreign nationals in the different member countries, or plans for such restrictions.

Table 4: The time dimension appearing in articles in the two newspapers

	Newspaper				Total	
	Magyar Nemzet		Népszabadság		Number of articles	(N=149)
	Number of articles	(N=58) ¹²	Number of articles	(N=91)		
Can be determined	52	89.7%	74	81.3%	126	84.6%
Past (<2005)	18	31.0%	28	30.8%	46	30.9%
Present (2005-2006)	44	75.9%	71	78.0%	115	77.2%
Future (>2006)	8	13.8%	8	8.8%	16	10.7%

¹² Several time dimensions may appear in individual articles. For this reason the percentage figures given in the table add up to more than 100%.

Social attitudes, proposed solutions

The attitude of government policy towards refugee affairs could be determined in more than two thirds of the articles on refugee affairs. This attitude was hostile in slightly more than half (75 articles) of all the publications (149 articles), while a tolerant government policy appeared in one fifth (29 articles). Within the articles where the government attitude could be determined (104 in all), close to two thirds showed a negative attitude. The attitude of civil society (organisations, local residents, general public opinion) towards refugee affairs figures in only a smaller proportion of the articles. This could be found in slightly more than a quarter (40) of the articles. Close to three quarters of these reported on a negative attitude, while inclusive attitudes figured in close to half¹³. In the case of inclusive attitudes most of the articles were about social organisations, while hostile attitudes were linked to local residents and to societies as a whole. There was no substantial difference between the two newspapers examined as regards the frequency of inclusive and hostile attitudes.

Table 5: Attitudes appearing in the articles on refugee affairs

Attitude	Attitude could be determined		Inclusive, tolerant		Indifferent		Judgmental, hostile	
	Number of articles	% (N=149)	Number of articles	% (N=149)	Number of articles	% (N=149)	Number of articles	% (N=149)
Government policy/policies ¹⁴	104	69.8%	29	19.5%	15	10.1%	75	50.3%
Civil society (civil organisations, local residents, general public opinion)	40	26.8%	18	12.1%	1	0.7%	29	19.5%

¹³ Inclusive, tolerant: If the journalists or the persons they interviewed expressed a positive view of government policy or civil society on refugee affairs.

Hostile, prejudiced: If the journalists or the persons they interviewed expressed a hostile view of government policy or civil society on refugee affairs.

¹⁴ One article may contain the government and civil society attitudes of several countries.

We examined the proposals contained in the articles concerning ways of handling the problems related to refugee affairs¹⁵. The adoption of stricter laws is mentioned in 14% of the articles, while close to one tenth contain proposals for the expulsion of persons involved in refugee affairs. Only one article mentions the possibility of milder legislation. There is no mention in any of the articles of more financial support and only three contain a proposal for a greater role to be taken by the state. Eight articles mention that increasing the number of programmes designed to assist integration could represent a solution for the problems of refugee affairs. The table below shows that in both papers only a few articles offered proposals for the solution of the problems of refugee affairs. In both papers there are more articles proposing expulsion and stricter legislation as a solution than there are proposals for solutions reflecting a positive attitude towards refugees (milder legislation, greater role for the state or support, integration). A higher proportion of solutions representing a positive attitude is found in Népszabadság than in Magyar Nemzet. Solutions representing a negative attitude appear with more emphasis in Magyar Nemzet.

Table 6: Proposed solutions appearing in the papers

	Newspaper				Total	
	Magyar Nemzet		Népszabadság		Number of articles	% (N=149)
	Number of articles	% (N=58)	Number of articles	% (N=91)		
Mentions a proposed	18	31.0%	21	23.1%	39	26.2%
Stricter laws, regulations	10	17.2%	11	12.1%	21	14.1%
Expulsion	7	12.1%	7	7.7%	14	9.4%
Milder laws, regulations	0	0.0%	1	1.1%	1	0.7%
Greater role for the state	0	0.0%	3	3.3%	3	2.0%
Greater financial support	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
More programmes helping integration	3	5.2%	5	5.5%	8	5.4%

¹⁵ We examined only what proposed solution appeared in the article – not whether the author agrees with the proposal.

¹⁶ It is important to take into account when interpreting the table that an article may contain more than one proposed solution.

General characteristics of persons involved in refugee affairs in the articles

The origin of persons involved in refugee affairs¹⁷ is specified in more than half of the articles. The nationality is mentioned more frequently in Népszabadság than in Magyar Nemzet¹⁸.

The majority of persons in refugee affairs figuring in the articles are of European origin (56 articles deal with persons in refugee affairs originating from Europe). Among European persons in refugee affairs the articles write mainly about Hungarians. These results can be attributed to the fact that the articles appearing in 2006 paid special attention to the exodus of Roma families from Hungary to Sweden. The articles on Hungarian persons in refugee affairs deal mainly with these people, although there are also writings on refugees in 1956, as well as on ethnic Hungarians who are not of Hungarian nationality (who came from Vojvodina, for example, to seek asylum in Hungary)¹⁹.

Table 7: Origin of persons involved in refugee affairs²⁰

	Newspaper				Total	
	Magyar Nemzet		Népszabadság		Number of articles mentioning given origin	(N=149)
	Number of articles mentioning given origin	(N=58)	Number of articles mentioning given origin	(N=91)		
Asia	11	19.0%	29	31.9%	40	26.8%
Europe	20	34.5%	36	39.6%	56	37.6%
America	2	3.4%	3	3.3%	5	3.4%
Africa	20	34.5%	27	29.7%	47	31.5%

¹⁷ We refer here to people in the following categories as persons involved in refugee affairs: asylum-seeker, refugee, unaccompanied minor, person received in another country, “menedékes” (a legal category in refugee affairs in Hungary only. It is related to a temporary protected status).

¹⁸ This proportion is close to 67% of the articles in Népszabadság and close to 45% of those in Magyar Nemzet. For the articles taken together: 57.0%.

¹⁹ Because in many articles it was not clear whether they were writing about a person’s nationality or ethnicity, we made no distinction between these code categories. In the special case where both a person’s nationality and ethnicity were clearly specified in an article and the two were not identical, we classified the article under both headings (for example, an article on Hungarians from Transylvania was classified in both the Hungarian and Romanian categories).

²⁰ It is important to take into account when interpreting the two tables on origin firstly that more than one ethnicity/nationality may be mentioned in an article and secondly that there were articles where only the continent was given as place of origin.

Table 8: Origin (nationality, ethnicity) of European persons involved in refugee affairs

	Newspaper				Total	
	Magyar Nemzet		Népszabadság		Number of articles mentioning given origin	(N=149)
	Number of articles mentioning given origin	(N=58)	Number of articles mentioning given origin	(N=91)		
Slovak	4	6.9%	1	1.1%	5	3.4%
Hungarian	14	24.1%	21	23.1%	35	23.5%
Romanian	6	10.3%	4	4.4%	10	6.7%
Serb	4	6.9%	7	7.7%	11	7.4%
Serb-Montenegrin	0	0.0%	2	2.2%	2	1.3%
Ukrainian	0	0.0%	4	4.4%	4	2.7%
Other European	2	3.4%	11	12.1%	13	8.7%

Often the articles make no mention of the personal characteristics other than origin of refugees and asylum-seekers. Among the characteristics we examined the authors most frequently wrote about the status the asylum-seekers obtained: this appeared in four-tenths of the articles. Where the articles report on the status obtained by persons involved in refugee affairs, in the majority of cases they write about refusal and expulsion (37 articles).

Among the personal characteristics, the reason for flight is mentioned in fewer than one fifth of the articles. According to the newspaper articles in most cases people become persecuted in their own country because of their political convictions (14 articles), but armed conflicts and civil wars²¹ also frequently appear as reasons for flight (12 articles). The gender and age of persons involved in refugee affairs are generally mentioned in around a quarter of the articles. Men figure in slightly more articles (30) than women (27). Adults figure in more articles (33) than children or minor refugees and asylum-seekers (21). If it is possible at all to determine the financial situation of persons involved in refugee affairs from the articles, it can be classified in the “rather bad” category (this is mentioned in 17 articles). Only eight articles refer to the educational qualifications of persons in refugee affairs and in these cases more emphasis is placed on the low level of schooling.

²¹ Armed conflict does not figure in the Geneva Convention (as a basis for granting refugee status), we include it among the causes listed because of the definition of “menedékes”.

The statuses obtained by persons involved in refugee affairs can be terminated in various ways: by renunciation, withdrawal or expiry. One of the articles reported on voluntary return to the home country and two mentioned expired status/permit.

Table 9: General characteristics of persons involved in refugee affairs

		Number of articles	%(N=149)
gender	Mentioned	38	25.5%
	men	30	20.1%
	women	27	18.1%
age	Mentioned	35	23.5%
	children, minors	21	14.1%
	adults	33	22.1%
educational qualifications	Mentioned	8	5.4%
	maximum primary	6	4.0%
	secondary	2	1.3%
	tertiary	3	2.0%
financial situation	Mentioned	20	13.4%
	bad	17	11.4%
	good	7	4.7%
Reason(s) for leaving home?	Mentioned	29	19.5%
	racial	4	2.7%
	religious	1	0.7%
	ethnic identity	1	0.7%
	political conviction	14	9.4%
	armed conflict, civil war	12	8.1%
Status obtained by persons applying for asylum	mentioned	54	36.2%
	received status	5	3.4%
	refugee status	11	7.4%
	in process	13	8.7%
	rejected and/or expelled	37	24.8%
How was refugee status terminated?	mentioned	3	2.0%
	at times by renunciation	1	0.7%
	at times by withdrawal/expiry	2	1.3%

One of the points considered in our analysis was whether the articles give voice to the person involved in refugee affairs. As we showed in the overview of the literature, it rarely happens that the persons directly involved are allowed to speak for themselves (Speers, 2001). In our material we found that while in 2005 the articles contained only very few personal reports by persons involved in refugee affairs (in 3.5% of the articles), in 2006 the situation improved: they were given a voice in 15% of the articles. The difference between the two years can be attributed to the fact that in 2005 there was more emphasis on events outside Hungary in which foreigners involved in refugee affairs were mentioned. In contrast, in 2006 many articles dealt with Roma asylum-seekers, among others travelling from Hungary to Sweden, and in many cases the persons directly involved expressed their views in the articles about them – mainly in *Népszabadság*.

Discussion

The theme of law and politics arose most frequently in the articles on refugee affairs in the two papers in 2005 and 2006. The high proportion of references to regulations and political positions conveys the picture that refugee affairs are a state and intergovernmental issue, an “official”, legal and political question rather than a humanitarian one. If the emphasis had been placed on humanitarian considerations, the articles could have written, among others, about the reasons why the persons involved in refugee affairs left their country. However, this form of presentation occurred only rarely in the papers. The high representation of the theme of politics and law is only partly explained by the profile of the papers examined. Our finding that refugee affairs typically appear in the papers examined as an official, political question is in line with the results of press image analyses carried out in several other countries.

Another important characteristic of the articles is that negative news predominate. Most of the articles concerned in both newspapers write about problems and conflicts in connection with refugee affairs. The question of refugee affairs is often linked to a negative topic: it is presented in connection with crime/deviant behaviour. Few articles write about positive developments. As we have shown, foreign research projects examining the media image of minorities, refugees and asylum-seekers also found that these groups are often presented in a negative light.



What can be the relevance of the fact that the media shows a negative picture of refugee affairs? Nowadays approaches assuming a minimal influence of the media are popular (Bajomi-Lázár 2006, Katz-Blumer-Gurevitch 1974, Petts et al 2001). It seems to us that some of these greatly underestimate the significance of the media influence and attribute too much power to the recipients in the process of interpreting media information. Although we accept the position that the interpretation of media information is an active process, for us this does not necessarily mean that the media have no influence or that their influence is only negligible. It is a fact that in certain cases this influence can be enormous. The media are capable of setting off mass hysteria or even ethnic conflict, as happened in Los Angeles in the early 1990s.

Several arguments can be put forward in support of the relevance of the media image with respect to the topic of refugee affairs. In the case of refugee affairs the media can be a more important source of information for many people than personal contacts, especially if there are relatively few persons involved in refugee affairs in the given country (Hartmann and Husband 1974 – cited in Finney - Peach 2004). The media also play an exceptional role as an information source in connection with refugee affairs because people receive negative information about members of minorities differently from news not about minorities (Csepeli et al, 1993). The importance of the media's role is also confirmed by the research which found that there is a connection between reports and attacks on refugees and asylum seekers. The investigation found that there was an increase in the number of such attacks when articles appeared in the press reporting on harassments but not condemning them (Esser and Brosius, 1996 – cited in Tait et al, 2004). The media play an especially big role in arousing 'moral panic' in such issues as crime or asylum (Coe et al, 2004). According to Cohen, one of the objects of moral panic today are refugees and asylum seekers. He explains this by the fact that reports on them speak about hostility and rejection; or they treat refugee affairs as a political issue: the successive British governments not only take the lead in the general hatred – thereby legitimising hostility – but they also speak about it in the sensation-seeking style of the tabloid papers (Cohen 2002 – cited in Finney - Peach 2004). A number of other authors also reached the conclusion that the media have a substantial impact in racial and ethnic issues (Miller – Philo 1999, Van Dijk 1991).

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