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NGOs raise alarms over new plans against migrants and refugees in Hungary

6 March 2015

Hungary's government is planning to introduce measures to reduce the number of asylum seekers in the country, which experts fear, will go against EU law.

According to the ECRE member organisation the [Hungarian Helsinki Committee \(HHC\)](#), the plans publicly announced by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and other government officials include passing legislation that would enable authorities to immediately detain and return *all* migrants entering irregularly in Hungary, including asylum seekers; accelerate asylum procedures so that decisions can be taken within a few days; oblige irregular migrants and asylum seekers to work while in Hungary in order to "earn their keep".

"These plans would not only violate EU law and other international obligations, but following on a [series of attacks on the rule of law since 2010](#), they would further undermine the country's commitment to European democratic values. The government repeatedly confirmed that they are aware that the planned amendments would breach EU law, yet they are prepared to go against "Brussels's will", HHC said.

On 10 February, Antal Rogán, head of the parliamentary group of the governing Fidesz Party, [said](#): "We are preparing for a decision that applies very strict treatment against immigrants and which, in a certain sense, clashes with the practice accepted by Brussels. We believe that the solution for this problem is the immediate detention of illegal migrants; we would like to apply this and we will ask the people whether they agree. Then, while they are in Hungary, they should be under control and we should enact legislation that allows us to deport them back to their homeland fast and without delay."

According to the Hungarian Helsinki Committee if the amendments go ahead it will be more difficult for EU Member States to return asylum seekers to Hungary under the [Dublin Regulation](#). "If the plans announced by the government to detain *all* asylum seekers and deport them after a few-day-long procedure are indeed to be implemented, Hungary will deliberately violate the most basic norms of EU asylum law and will exclude itself from Common European Asylum System", said Gábor Gyulai, refugee programme coordinator at the Hungarian Helsinki Committee.

42,777 people applied for asylum in Hungary in 2014 (compared to 18,900 in 2013 and 2,157 in 2012). 28,535 asylum claims were registered in January and February 2015 alone. However, the vast majority of asylum seekers move on to other EU Member States. According to the Office of Immigration and Nationality (OIN), approximately 80% of asylum seekers disappear and leave Hungary within less than 10 days after the submission of their asylum claim.

Most asylum seekers entering Hungary were nationals from Kosovo, with 21,453 asylum claims in 2014 and 22,975 in January and February 2015. However, nobody from Kosovo has received refugee status or subsidiary protection in Hungary during this period. According to the HHC, apparently, due to coordinated international border policing efforts on the Kosovo-Serbian and Serbian-Hungarian border, as well as the stepped-up campaigning within Kosovo, the number of Kosovars seeking asylum in Hungary has dropped significantly in the last week of February.

The HHC has argued that the vast majority of non-Kosovar asylum seekers arriving in Hungary in 2014 and early 2015 come from conflict zones and oppressive regimes and unlike the number of Kosovars, the volume of these groups does not seem to decrease. Afghan citizens are the second largest group of asylum seekers (8,796 applications in 2014 and 2,631 in January and February 2015), followed by Syrians (6,857 applications in 2015 and 1,226 in January and February 2015). Iraqi, Palestinian, Sudanese, Eritrean, Somali and Iranian asylum seekers also arrive in significant numbers.

Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán [said](#) on 11 January, on the day of the demonstration following the terrorist attacks in Paris: "Economic migration is a bad thing in Europe, it should not be looked at as if there were any benefits in it, because it only brings pain and threat to the people of Europe; therefore immigration must be stopped, this is the Hungarian position. [...] We do not want to see among us a significant minority that has a different cultural background and characteristics from ours, we would like to preserve Hungary as Hungary."

It is still not known publicly when the amendments will be presented and how the government plans to extend its detention capacity to implement the envisioned increase in detention of migrants and asylum seekers.

For further information:

- EU Observer, [Hungary wants stricter immigration rules amid hike in Kosovo migrants](#), 11 February 2015
- Asylum Information Database (AIDA), [Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights report on Hungary](#), 16 January 2015
- B92, [Extra police to be deployed on border with Hungary](#), 9 February 2015

- Asylum in Europe Database, [Highlights from Hungary 2014: Widespread use of detention in Hungary with no effective judicial review](#)
 - Euronews, [Kosovo emptying out, hopes for independent future exhausted](#), 17 February 2015
 - Politics.hu, [Orbán: illegal borders-crossers must be taken into custody](#), 17 February 2015
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