

# Minorities at War

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Cultural Identity and Resilience in  
Ukraine

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## Chapter 11

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War-induced ethnic dynamics in  
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# 11 Exodus of the Hungarian minority from Ukraine? War-induced ethnic dynamics in the Ukrainian-Hungarian border region

*Ágnes Erőss, Katalin Kovály and Patrik Tátrai*

## Introduction

Transcarpathia (or Subcarpathia, Hung. *Kárpátalja*) is a region on the move. We had no idea just how much when we started our joint research on this westernmost region of Ukraine in 2016; however, one of us was born and raised there, speaking both Ukrainian and Hungarian languages and linked to the region with a dense network. Two of us are Hungarians from Hungary who conducted research in Transcarpathia – with different intensity and focus – since 2007. Since 2016, we have recorded more than 120 semi-structured interviews, the majority in Hungarian language, in 21 municipalities for 3 international and 4 national projects.<sup>1</sup> Particularly in 2023 we conducted three rounds of field research in Transcarpathia (in March, July, November). We collected 16 semi-structured interviews in Hungarian in 2 towns and several villages, mainly along the Hungarian border. Through the years, we have witnessed how the region has transformed. Let us recall some memories.

We walk in the pleasant summer sunshine in Uzhhorod, the county seat of Transcarpathia. It is July 2016, one and a half years after the Euromaidan and the eruption of armed conflict in Donbas. We see the new memorial dedicated to the *Nebesna Sotnya* (Heavenly Hundred)<sup>2</sup> and meet members of an NGO representing IDPs from the Donetsk region who settled in Uzhhorod, a few hundred well-educated professionals, men, and women. The war is *their* experience; it happens some 1,000 km away, beyond the Carpathian Mountain range. Far away. In the city, any suitable surface hosts job advertisements that recruit workers to Czechia, Poland, and Hungary. Visegrad four countries finance infrastructural and cultural programs. Hungarian language classes are offered in language schools, but Hungary finances free courses in the region. Hungary sponsors the reconstruction of a university dormitory in Uzhhorod and subsidises the minority education and cultural institutions in the whole region. After sunset, a Hungarian pop song fills the city's centre, followed by Ukrainian and international ones. Despite the bad road conditions and general decay of buildings and infrastructure, Uzhhorod is a pleasant city. To

visit maybe, not to live in. It is reflected in the general narrative of the interlocutors, representatives of the Hungarian community: “Everybody is leaving now.”

We walk in the pleasant sunshine in Uzhhorod, in July 2023, one and half years after the launch of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. Ukrainian national flags dominate the public space, and gigantic murals depicting allegoric or symbolic figures referring to Ukraine appear on the previously empty walls of high-rise buildings. Air raid sirens suddenly go off. The front is still hundreds of kilometres from Uzhhorod, but the war is *here*; its consequences are very present. Thousands of IDPs have arrived. New cafes and restaurants are mushrooming, which serve a new clientele. Besides Ukrainian, the Russian language reappeared in the soundscape. Job advertisements are everywhere, but mainly offering positions in Transcarpathia. We had not heard any Hungarian words in three days except when talking with the Hungarian interlocutors. Nevertheless, the institutions of the little Hungarian world seem intact: the statues and memorials are standing, and the Hungarian news outlets and educational institutions exist, despite Ukrainian laws restricting the use of minority languages,<sup>3</sup> which are a real threat to their continued operation. They have fewer participants/students, and rarely any men appear. “Really, by now everybody has gone”; “I regret my naivety, ...I regret that I returned from Hungary last March. Now I am trapped” (man, 37, Uzhhorod 2023).

The two vignettes illustrate the significant changes that have taken place in urban areas in Transcarpathia over the past decade, especially for the Hungarian minority. However, Transcarpathia had a turbulent history before the last decade. It witnessed several border changes over the last hundred years. It was a part of the Hungarian Kingdom before 1919 and between 1939 and 1944; while during the interwar period, it belonged to Czechoslovakia under the name *Podkarpatska Rus*. Following World War II, it was incorporated into the Ukrainian SSR as an administrative district of *Zakarpatska Oblast*. Since 1991, under the same name, it has been a part of the independent Ukraine, sharing borders with Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania (Fedinec 2022). Although the ethnic diversity, characteristic of the region 100 years ago, has decreased, ethnic minorities still form about 20% of the 1.26 million inhabitants according to the last 2001 census (mainly Hungarians, Romanians, Russians, Roma, and people who identify as Rusyn or Ruthenian). Ethnic Hungarians, densely inhabiting the Ukrainian-Hungarian border zone, form the largest ethnic minority (Molnár and Molnár 2005), which greatly explains Hungary’s political interest in the region.

Even though the state authority over this territory has changed several times during the 20th century, the peripheral position of Transcarpathia remained constant under any state formation. As a periphery and due to the proximity of borders, it is traditionally characterised by high out-migration (Mezentsev and Pidgrushnyi 2014). Even during the decades of socialism, migration remained a typical phenomenon, strictly controlled by the state. Mobility has increased since the early 1990s due to the dramatic deterioration

of economic conditions in Ukraine. Since in Transcarpathia, as in post-Soviet regions in general, the state has hardly provided a minimal standard of living (Zhurzhenko 2010); individual resilience and rapid adaptation have been essential for survival. All this has led to the intensification of mobility – already significant – and informal economic strategies linked to Transcarpathia’s border to generate income (petty trade and smuggling). Circularity has become a dominant feature of the mobility strategies of people in Transcarpathia, for example, in the case of working abroad or regular cross-border movements (e.g. commuting, smuggling, and retail trade), but also permanent resettlement has become an increasingly usual form (Borbély 2015). Migration has become an individual and family livelihood strategy, which either provides the family’s major income or is an important supplement to the household budget. Working abroad made it possible to get by at home: some family members’ labour migration allowed the rest of the family to stay at home (Morokvasic 2004).

The form, destination, and temporality of migration have been influenced by macro-structural factors such as visa regimes, conditions for working or studying in the destination countries, higher accessible wages, travel, and living costs (Eróss et al. 2016). Migration can be constrained or hindered by changes in macro-level processes (economic factors, employment, or border crossing conditions), forcing migrants to develop flexible adaptation strategies. Thus, we also point to the individual agency: migrants can develop diversified mechanisms to navigate through external constraints and adapt to the often-changing geopolitical circumstances in the region (Józwiak 2021).

The migration of ethnic Hungarians living in Transcarpathia shows some particular features compared to other Transcarpathians: the kin-state, Hungary, borders Transcarpathia, and this geographical vicinity has made it an even more attractive destination. Moreover, following 1990, Hungary has developed strong ties with co-ethnics living in neighbouring countries (Bárdi 2011). Nevertheless, after the right-wing populist Fidesz party came into power in 2010, ethnic-kin relationships have been prioritised: Hungary launched related policy documents, set up and/or enlarged the institutional backbone to support its increased kin-state activism in the region,<sup>4</sup> including Transcarpathia. Consequently, Hungary’s kin-state policies have influenced Transcarpathian Hungarians’ migration trajectories (Tátrai et al. 2017).

In a highly mobile region, external factors, like the Russian-Ukrainian war that started in 2014 and developed into a full-scale war in 2022, have further accelerated migration. However, there is no reliable data on the exact impact of these geopolitical crises (especially the most recent one) on the migration, population, and ethnic composition of the region.

Therefore, this chapter aims to present the demographic processes of the Hungarian minority in Transcarpathia in the last decade with a special emphasis on the determining factor, migration. The study is the first attempt to outline how the macrostructural context (geopolitical shifts and economic conditions) affected the demographic features of the Hungarian population in

Transcarpathia by comparing several sources of available statistical data. The interpretation of the quantitative data will be complemented by the results of qualitative data collection to provide a more accurate picture and possible explanations for the discrepancy between statistical data and field experience and to show the transformations in the migration patterns triggered by the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022.

Based on some relevant and available statistics (Summa 2017 survey, recent unpublished church and school statistics in Transcarpathia, and migration statistics in Hungary)<sup>5</sup> and the qualitative field research carried out in Transcarpathia since 2016 and on the Hungarian side of the border since 2022, we argue that after two mass waves of migration induced by the geopolitical events, emigration has sped up and migration has become the new norm for the Transcarpathian Hungarian community. We highlight that even under macro-structural constraints, individuals and families could develop coping strategies based on migration, which grant them a scope of action or a relatively “safe landing” in the new environment.

In what follows, we first review the demographic characteristics of Hungarians in Transcarpathia, with a particular focus on migration. Then, we will show the periods that can be drawn in the demographic trends in Transcarpathia since February 24, 2022. Afterwards, we will look at the current demographic trends of the Hungarian population in Transcarpathia and the Ukrainian-Hungarian border region. Our work is a snapshot, reflecting the situation at the time of writing and the last data collection, i.e. October 2023.

### **The Hungarian minority in Transcarpathia before 2022**

The vast majority of ethnic Hungarians in Ukraine, around 97%, live in Transcarpathia as an autochthonous minority. Their numbers, like those of other national minorities in the region, have been influenced primarily by power relations. They were entitled as the titular ethnic group until World War I's end, when their number peaked at 184,287 according to the 1910 Hungarian census. However, due to the frequent border changes, the number of Hungarians, and all ethnic groups in the area, fluctuated, typically in favour of the titular ethnic group.

By the beginning of the 21st century, compared to a hundred years earlier, the number of Hungarians and minority ethnic groups, in general, had decreased, and the ethnic composition of the population in Transcarpathia had become homogenised. According to the last census in Ukraine held in 2001, the number of Hungarians has declined to 151,516 (12.1% of the country's population). Most live in masse along the Ukrainian-Hungarian border (Figure 11.1). This well-organised community developed full-scale educational, cultural, and religious institutions, relying on their kin-state's support (Cserniczkó and Kontra 2023). Their ethnic concentration, high level of institutionalisation, and relatively clear ethnic group membership based on mostly

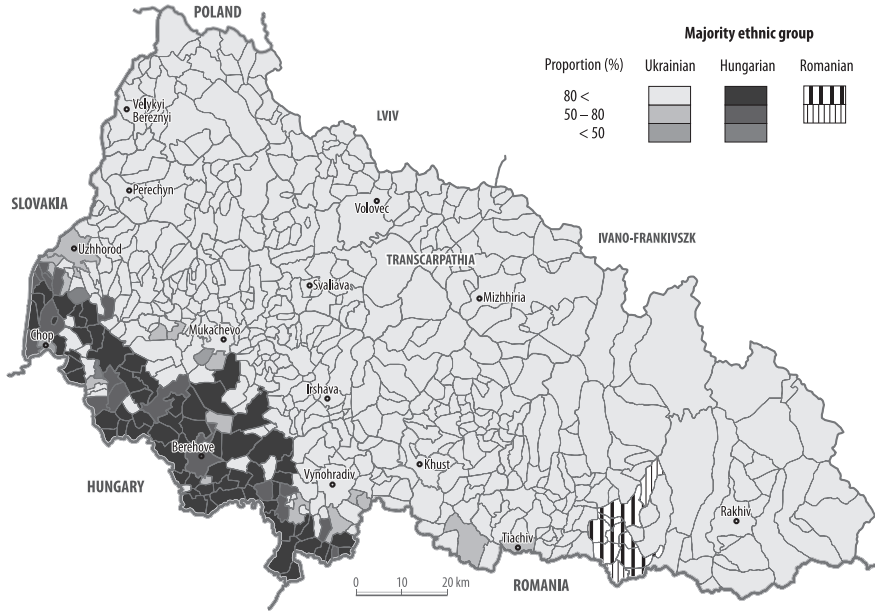


Figure 11.1 Ethnic map of Transcarpathia according to the 2001 census.

cultural criteria (mainly the language) contribute to their quite solid ethnic and local identity (Veres 2015). According to the 2001 census, 97% of the ethnic Hungarians in Ukraine declared Hungarian as their native language.

The number of Hungarians has decreased within the independent Ukraine mainly due to the negative migration balance (Molnár and Molnár D. 2005). For the post-2001 period, there are no official statistics on ethnic composition, only estimates of the evolution of the Hungarian population. This is mainly based on the migration statistics in Hungary (e.g. Karácsonyi and Kincses 2020), which we consider to be an appropriate proxy for the patterns and volumes of out-migration of Transcarpathian Hungarians since Hungary has been the primary destination country for most Transcarpathian Hungarian migrants since the 1990s. During the 2000s, migration reduced the number of Transcarpathia Hungarians by about 10,000–20,000 people (Molnár and Molnár D. 2005; Karácsonyi and Kincses 2020).

However, after 2010, there have been several developments that have had a significant impact on the migration of Transcarpathian Hungarians. Firstly, the simplified (re)naturalisation came into force in 2011 in Hungary enabling those who, or whose ancestors were citizens of the Kingdom of Hungary and speaking Hungarian to acquire Hungarian citizenship without residing in Hungary. This has significantly facilitated resettlement and/or labour migration to Hungary and with the Hungarian passport, to other EU member states. Secondly, the geopolitical events in Ukraine since the autumn of 2013

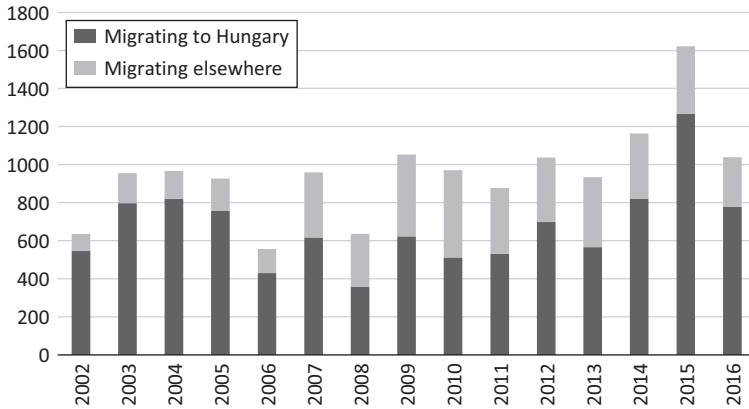
(Euromaidan and armed conflict in eastern Ukraine) have led to an economic downturn, while military operations and conscription have increased the fear of insecurity (Tátrai et al. 2017). As a result, the emigration of Hungarians from Transcarpathia gained momentum from 2014 onwards.

The year of 2014 as a turning point is also confirmed by statistical data. Analysing migration statistics in Hungary, Karácsonyi, and Kincses (2020) found that while between 2001 and 2011, about 13,000 Transcarpathian Hungarians (an average of 1,300 per year) migrated to Hungary, between 2011 and 2017, the total number of all Transcarpathian Hungarians who migrated to Hungary reached 19,000 (an average of 3,200 per year), which shows a significant acceleration of migration. Indeed, Hungarian statistics registered more than 50,000 Transcarpathian immigrants between 2001 and 2017, but the inaccuracy of the statistics (possible multiple registrations due to circular migration and commuting; residence registration without actually living in Hungary) and the relatively high (20–30%) share of ethnic Ukrainians among the total migrant stock (Gödri and Csányi 2020) should be considered. Overall, based on the otherwise rather contradictory Hungarian statistics, the migration loss of Hungarians from Transcarpathia between the 2001 Ukrainian census and 2017 was estimated at around 21,000–36,000 (Karácsonyi and Kincses 2020; Tátrai et al. 2018).

The role of geopolitical events in Ukraine since 2014 in inducing migration is also confirmed by the Summa 2017 survey, which examined the demographic characteristics of Transcarpathian Hungarians (Tátrai et al. 2018). This study found that the migration loss of Hungarians was 15,000 between 2001 and 2017. However, between 2002–2013, an average of 900–950 people moved abroad per year; this number jumped to an average of 1,200–1,300 people after the outbreak of the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine in 2014 (Figure 11.2). Hungary has been the destination country for most emigrants throughout the past decades (70.4% overall), but many chose Germany, the Czech Republic, and the United Kingdom. In recent years, due to the (geo) political and economic crisis in Ukrainian and Hungarian policy measures<sup>6</sup> (see details in Tátrai et al. 2017), Hungary has been the destination country for three-quarters of emigrating Transcarpathian Hungarians.

The Summa 2017 study examined temporary migration as well, as it also shapes the size of the Hungarian population. Approximately 22% of the total Hungarian population (30% of the active age population) reported spending at least one month abroad in 2016. This means that 27,000–28,000 Hungarians were involved in temporary/seasonal cross-border movements for various purposes. About two-thirds of those who went abroad (18,000–19,000 people) spent at least three months abroad; they are those circular and/or seasonal migrants who work or study in the destination countries, mainly Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Germany (Szanyi et al. 2017; Tátrai et al. 2018).

Overall, the Summa 2017 survey estimated the number of Hungarians in Transcarpathia at 130,000 (Tátrai et al. 2018). However, if those involved in temporary migration are excluded, this figure could be significantly lower.



*Figure 11.2* Yearly number of Transcarpathian Hungarians out-migrating between 2002 and 2016.

*Source:* Summa 2017.

This is supported by immigration statistics from Hungary, based on which Karácsonyi and Kincses (2020) estimate only 120,000 ethnic Hungarians for the same date. Regardless of the specific figure, however, it is clear that the demographic processes of the Transcarpathian Hungarians have been primarily determined by emigration, and the geopolitical-socio-economic context that emerged after 2013 did not favour staying in the homeland.

To understand the complex migration process, it is essential to note that circular migration and associated dual residency became an increasingly important phenomenon in the second half of the 2010s (Tátrai et al. 2017). The dual residency practically means that while keeping their homes in Transcarpathia, families bought real estate in Hungary. As Figure 11.3 illustrates, the villages near the border crossing points were the prime locations of these purchases and immigration. These property purchases served two purposes. On the one hand, any public service or administration requires a registered address in Hungary. Therefore, those who wanted to arrange health care or pension in Hungary and had capital could register in the property they bought.<sup>7</sup> However, the Hungarian residence typically functioned more as a temporary home: the couple or individual family members used it as a stopover on the way to work in the West. Alternatively, it could serve as a base for holidays in Hungary, to run errands, to go to school/university from there, etc. The temporary residential status was also influenced by the fact that these houses were often deplorable, even without comfort, and provided lower-quality living conditions. Those with more capital or who did not plan to return home frequently bought higher-standard property in nearby larger towns or the more economically prosperous parts of the country. The interviews revealed that, besides the two practical aspects mentioned above, a third factor played a role





*Figure 11.3* Population changes in Hungary by municipalities, 2011–2021.

*Source:* National Atlas of Hungary ([www.emna.hu](http://www.emna.hu)).

when buying property: the unpredictable war situation. Several interviewees said that they were also looking for property in Hungary because who knows what the future will bring: they might need another property in Hungary at any time if they have to leave Ukraine. The 2022 invasion proved them right.

### **Major population dynamics and social changes in the Ukrainian-Hungarian border zone since 2022**

#### *Inflow: IDPs in Transcarpathia*

Transcarpathia had been a significant destination for IDPs since the first days of the war. The first refugees arrived in the region as early as the afternoon of February 24, 2022. Most sought shelter in hotels, motels, and any available accommodation. According to our interlocutors, the IDPs chose Transcarpathia because they wanted to be as close to the border as possible. From the second or third day of the war, local governments and NGOs overtook the coordination and arranged the placements. Dormitories, schools, and kindergartens were hastily converted to shelters. The more affluent could afford to stay in hotels. According to the announcement by the governor of Transcarpathia in March 2022, the number of officially registered displaced persons was 156,000, of which 40,000 stayed in Uzhhorod.

Over time, IDPs moved from the villages to larger towns, with favourable housing conditions and job opportunities. Besides, as IDPs mainly arrived from big cities, they got used to urban life. As one of our village interlocutors put it in March 2023, the family from Odessa they hosted was very grateful for the shelter, but they could not get used to the village environment (cows bellowing, roosters crowing, social life happening on one street, if at all) and after a month they moved to the nearest town. In the summer of 2022, and later, when electric power cuts were common in Transcarpathia, some families returned to the East.

The UN International Organization for Migration conducted a survey in November 2022 (IOM 2023). According to their numbers, 162,400 IDPs were officially registered in Transcarpathia. They mainly come from three eastern oblasts: Kharkiv, Donetsk, and Zaporizhzhya. More than half of them live in and around bigger towns, mainly in Uzhhorod, Mukachevo, Berehovo, Tiachiv, and Khust. The actual number of IDPs in Transcarpathia is estimated as double the number registered, i.e. 400,000 (IOM 2023, 3). Fear of being called up is one of the most frequently mentioned reasons for not registering. It explains the higher proportion of women among registered refugees (56%) than among the local population in Transcarpathia, while the proportion of men among the non-registered is higher (55%) (IOM 2023, 3). Approximately 32% of IDPs were able to find part-time or full-time job in Transcarpathia. Non-registered refugees have higher employment and are financially more independent, working remotely in IT/communications or creative professions (IOM 2023, 11, 15). Another reason for not registering as IDPs is that many of them plan to migrate further, either to other parts of Ukraine or abroad, and simply feel that there is no need to “get in the system” (IOM 2023, 8).

The arrival of the 400,000 IDPs (which is one-third of the county’s population) has shaped the landscape and fundamentally changed the lives of autochthonous residents. For instance, in Uzhhorod, several new cafés have opened, their terraces filled at all hours with laptop-toting IT guys and girls, mums with strollers, or casually or elegantly dressed business people. When discussing the changes, Hungarian interlocutors mention that “rocker and punk-looking” people and many more tattooed men and women are visible on the streets. In their opinion, a new cohort of society appeared in the city: the very affluent people (expensive cars they have not seen before, the opening of three stores selling Apple products, or a new elite restaurant). Women dressed in the latest fashion and using cutting edge facial and nail treatments create the demand for (according to local standards) luxurious beauty salons. Nevertheless, residents of Uzhhorod are mostly positive about the arrival of IDPs: they boost local business and enhance the discovery of commonalities between Transcarpathians and the Ukrainians coming beyond the Carpathian Mountains. At the same time, the arrival of IDPs also creates tensions. The sudden rise in property rents or the higher consumption standards of some IDPs compared to those of the Transcarpathians (maybe) a latent source of tension, which might be escalating due to the lack of interactions between the locals

and IDPs (IOM 2023, 17). Also, it is worth mentioning that in some locations with a significant Hungarian population (e.g. Berehovo/Beregszász), our interlocutors have a rather negative attitude towards the influx of IDPs. They feel that the Ukrainian language is increasingly suppressing Hungarian on the streets, in shops, and in everyday use. They are also concerned that the future of Hungarian education could be at risk due to the large number of newly immigrated, Ukrainian-speaking population.

### *Outflow: migration from Ukraine to Hungary*

Since February 2022, the launch of the full-scale Russian invasion, the local discourse and field experiences have been centred around the mass exodus of Hungarians from Ukraine. In addition to linguistic and cultural proximity, the out-migration was also facilitated by the fact that holding a Hungarian citizenship (and thus a passport) became general: in 2019, 80% of Hungarians in Transcarpathia already held a Hungarian passport (Ferenc and Rákóczi 2020). Interlocutors confirmed that on the 24th of February, many families left, packing only a suitcase and leaving behind everything. They crossed the border as Hungarian citizens and settled in Hungary without administrative restriction, but they could not be granted temporary protection (Csányi 2022; Urbán 2023). However, due to their dense social networks in Hungary, including already resettled friends and relatives, most could secure a basic livelihood or organise the conditions for a new life (housing, job search, and schooling), which might make the decision-making about crossing the border emotionally less stressful. Overall, since ethnic Hungarians from Transcarpathia arrived in Hungary as Hungarian citizens, statistical monitoring of the patterns and volume of migration is a rather difficult task.

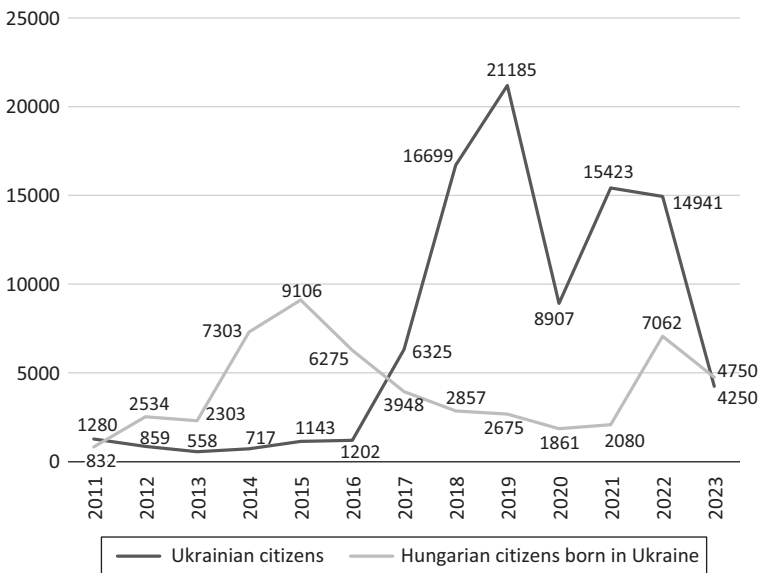
People arriving in Hungary from Ukraine can be classified into three main statistical categories: individuals under temporary protection,<sup>8</sup> foreign (Ukrainian) citizens, and foreign- (Ukrainian-) born Hungarian citizens. The first two categories include mainly ethnic Ukrainians, while the last category may be associated with primarily ethnic Hungarians.<sup>9</sup> Further complicating the analysis is that the data set is uneven: in 2023, in addition to the 82,000 people born in Ukraine, there was also a contingent of around 23,000 people born in the Soviet Union.<sup>10</sup> But there was also a large number of ethnic Ukrainians among the Hungarian citizens born in Ukraine. This is underpinned by the fact that the number of those applying for Hungarian citizenship in Ukraine in 2019 was close to 180,000, significantly higher than the number of Hungarians in Transcarpathia, according to the 2001 census or the 2017 survey mentioned above.

Even considering these methodological limitations, the Hungarian immigration data provides interesting, even surprising results. Despite the local experiences in Transcarpathia, which indicates a dramatic decrease in the Hungarian community, the number of Ukrainian-born Hungarian citizens (stock data) residing in Hungary increased only slightly (by 10%) from 61,900

on January 1, 2022, to 68,300 on January 1, 2023. Although the number of Ukrainian-born Hungarian citizens (flow data) entering Hungary in 2022 has increased significantly compared to previous years, in absolute volume, it lags behind the wave registered after the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2014, peaking in 2015 (Figure 11.4).

The gender balance of immigrating people was even in 2022, with no significant change compared to the previous year. It suggests that many men liable for military service left Transcarpathia, even though most would not have been able to leave Ukraine legally from the early stages of the war. It is worth noting that at the outbreak of the armed conflict in 2014, the proportion of men among the migrants was close to 60%, in connection with the fear of being drafted at that time. However, the age composition of the immigrant population has changed significantly compared to before the outbreak of the full-scale war. While in previous years, the proportion of immigrants aged under 15 was around 15%, it increased to 25% in 2022. This was mainly offset by a decrease in the share of people aged 60 and over.

In contrast, the immigration of Ukrainian citizens (who might be associated with ethnic Ukrainians) shows a somewhat different picture. The number of Ukrainian citizens residing in Hungary (stock data) increased by 17% from 30,700 on January 1, 2022, to 36,000 on January 1, 2023, a significant but far from exceptional change. Interestingly, the number of people entering Hungary (flow data) in 2022 was slightly lower than in 2021 (Figure 11.4),



*Figure 11.4* The number of Ukrainian and Hungarian citizens born in Ukraine migrating to Hungary (flow data) in 2011–2023.

*Source:* Compiled by the authors based on the Dissemination Database of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office.

but the number of outflows fell even more. This suggests that many who appeared as temporary workers in earlier years preferred not to return because of the war (presumably, predominantly men). A significant change compared to 2021 is that while 65–70% of immigrants were previously male, in line with the employment of Ukrainian nationals in the industry (Lipták and Kincses 2023), this figure fell to 40% in 2022. The proportion of immigrants under 15 years old increased to 20%, compared to around 1% in the past. There was also a small peak between 2013 and 2015, when the armed conflict in Donbas broke out, although not nearly as large as in 2022.

Some interesting conclusions can be drawn from the above figures. Regarding Ukrainian citizens, it is clear that it was mainly women who came to Hungary with children, while men of military age arrived in much lower numbers than before, partly because they could not cross the border. In contrast, Ukrainian-born Hungarian citizens reacted similarly in 2014: whole families migrated in larger proportions than before, meaning that men did not stay at home either.

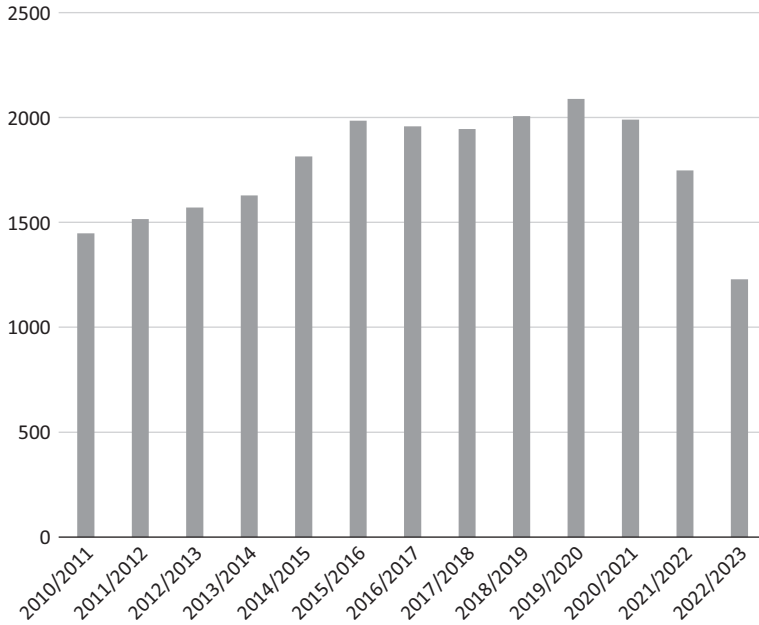
Our fieldwork on the Hungarian side of the border zone confirmed the influx of Transcarpathian Hungarians. Similarly to Transcarpathia, the Hungarian side of the border has also undergone some changes as effect of the war. The first few weeks after the launch of the Russian invasion in 2022 created much attention to this otherwise peripheral corner of the country: aid workers, journalists, and volunteers flooded the tiny villages. A few months later, life returned to its normal, slow pace. However, our interviewees confirmed that immigration and the demand for purchasing property have greatly increased in the border zone. The significant difference between the situation after 2014 and the present is that now the “newcomers” have renovated their houses. As locals mentioned, the easiest way to spot a Transcarpathian Hungarian household is to look for the newest or freshly renovated homes. Those Transcarpathian Hungarian interlocutors who purchased their houses after 2014 confirmed that while previously they had not spent much money and effort on their house in Hungary, after 2022, they started renovating them. They moved their base to Hungary, where the refurbished homes serve their comfort and enable them to host family members and friends who work in the West and travel back to Hungary regularly to visit their family or for those family members stranded on different sides of the border. Consequently, the trend is clear: the previously purchased second homes in Hungary have become prime residence after 2022. Similarly, in the case of IDPs arriving in the urban areas of Transcarpathia, the resettled Transcarpathians “revitalised” the border zone in Hungary: the massive demand for real estate raised the prices, so those who wanted to leave could sell their houses for a higher price. Transcarpathian teachers, doctors, nurses, clerks, and craftsmen were instantly employed; the kids were much needed in small local schools, some struggling for survival. However, the othering is already present in the discourses; so far, any conflict has remained latent.

*The shift in social structure and demography of the Hungarian minority in Transcarpathia*

The above-detailed turbulent migration flows induced significant transformations in the Transcarpathian Hungarian population. Without statistical data, we can only assess these processes from indirect data sources and interviews. Undoubtedly, the war negatively affected the demography of Hungarians in Transcarpathia, much more than the Hungarian immigration statistics show. Indeed, as field experiences suggest, the rural peripheries along the border inhabited chiefly by ethnic Hungarians emptied out. However, this out-migration was highly selective. Mainly people in the productive age left, typically with their families. Young men liable for military service also left in large numbers, even crossing the Hungarian border illegally. As a result, the demographic composition of local Hungarian communities has become biased, with an over-representation of older people and women. Out-migration has been selective not only by demographic composition but also by social status. As in many previous cataclysms (like after World War II), the intellectuals and the Hungarian elite were over-represented among the emigrants. This posed a significant challenge to the maintenance of community life and the running of institutions.

We tried to estimate the volume of emigration from two sources: church and school statistics. Two-thirds of Hungarians in Transcarpathia belong to the Reformed Church. According to the unpublished data of the largest diocese of the Reformed Church in Transcarpathia, the number of church maintenance contribution payers decreased by 25% from 31,000 in January 2022 to 24,000 in January 2023. School statistics report an even more significant drop. The number of first graders in Hungarian schools fell by 30% between the school year 2021–2022 and 2022–2023 (Figure 11.5). But compared to the peak in 2020, the drop is 40%. This data cannot be fully extrapolated to the Hungarian population in Transcarpathia, as the proportion of native speakers of Ukrainian has been increasing in the Hungarian school system over the past decade. However, a regional breakdown of the data shows that the decline in the core Hungarian settlement area was significantly higher than the average. In contrast, in the ethnic contact zone, where the proportion of native Ukrainian speakers in Hungarian schools was higher, the decline was smaller.

These statistics suggest that the number of ethnic Hungarians in Transcarpathia may have decreased by 25–30% as a direct result of the war, while a 40% decrease seems more likely compared to the 2017 survey. Based on all these indirect sources, we estimate the number of Hungarians in Transcarpathia today at roughly 80,000–90,000, significantly different from the figures emerging from migration statistics.



*Figure 11.5* The number of first-grade pupils enrolled in Hungarian-language primary schools in Transcarpathia, 2010–2023.

*Source:* Compiled by the authors based on the unpublished data of Transcarpathian Hungarian Pedagogical Association.

## Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the demographic characteristics of the Hungarian minority in Transcarpathia, focusing on the migration process in the last decade. Our study found that the emigration of Transcarpathian Hungarians from their homeland has been continuous over that period. The geographical proximity of the kin-state, Hungary, and the availability of non-residential Hungarian citizenship since 2011 fundamentally influences the direction of migration from the homeland. If we only rely on migration statistics, we find that the outbreak of the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war in 2022 did not create a peak in the migration of ethnic Hungarians from Transcarpathia to Hungary. Specifically, the annual increase in the number of immigrants was “only” 13% after the outbreak of the full-scale war in 2022, and 20% after the outbreak of the armed conflict in East Ukraine in 2014. Surprisingly, these were outnumbered by the increase between 2018 and 2019 (23%), when ethnic Ukrainian workers entered the Hungarian labour market in large numbers. In contrast, the sporadic and indirect statistics in Transcarpathia suggest that the decline in the number of ethnic Hungarians in Transcarpathia was much higher (over 30%) than reflected in the Hungarian

migration statistics. Although the statistics are rather ambiguous, it seems certain that the outmigration of Hungarians and immigration of IDPs to Transcarpathia fundamentally changed the ethnic makeup of the region.

However, combining quantitative data with qualitative results reveals more complex processes. The coping strategies (i.e., purchase of houses in Hungary and acquiring Hungarian citizenship) invented in the wake of the armed conflict in Donbas in 2014 worked and were utilised in 2022. These second homes in Hungary functioned as a springboard to Central and Western Hungary or Western Europe in the 2010s. In contrast, after February 2022, these second homes have become prime residences for many families. Additionally, young men who wanted to avoid military conscription found shelter temporarily in these homes. Nevertheless, some remained second homes, where male family members working in Western Europe can regularly meet the family who stay in Transcarpathia. In sum, the Hungarians in Transcarpathia reacted to the geopolitical turmoil by gradually reconfiguring the previously existing residences. They shifted from sustaining dual residency to living in Hungary; temporary places of residence became permanent. The crises that came on the conveyor belt thus formed interlocking coping strategies.

Although it is difficult to get an accurate picture without exact statistical data, field experiences and interviews suggest that the emigration of Transcarpathian Hungarians from their homeland is selective: men of conscription age tend to emigrate. Their families accompany many, reflected in a decreased number of school children. Selective emigration distorts the demographic structure in Transcarpathia, with women over-represented alongside older people.

The emigration of the active population and children seriously threatens the maintenance of the Hungarian educational and cultural institutional network. It might undermine bargaining power in the struggle for language and minority rights. All this occurs in an already highly nationalising political context where a fierce struggle exists to preserve minority language rights in Ukraine (see Haertel's chapter in this volume). The situation is further complicated because numerous leading community figures and opinion leaders of the Hungarian minority in Transcarpathia have also moved to Hungary. The arrival of the IDPs impacts the position of the Transcarpathia Hungarian minority. They constitute a significant population increase in Transcarpathia, which otherwise had a population of 1.2 million in 2001. Therefore, the ethnic Hungarian population, which has decreased due to displacement, will continue to shrink in proportion because of the influx of Ukrainians. Currently, it seems that as an effect of constant inflows and outflows, the ethnic and linguistic composition of Transcarpathia transforms. Additionally, the settlement structure of the resident population also goes through a significant change: rural places empty out while the towns, particularly Uzhhorod, the county seat, experience a rapid population growth. In contrast to the rural peripheries in Transcarpathia, the Hungarian side of the border, also a rural and peripheral region, experienced a population influx due to the displacement of ethnic Hungarians from Transcarpathia.



In sum, this chapter illustrates that the everyday life of Transcarpathian Hungarians is not confined to nation-states' territories: their activities and coping strategies transgress the national boundaries, implemented in a transnational space, where economic rationality and opportunities allow for rapid adaptation to new situations. The rapid adaptation also means that many of our interlocutors leave the possibility to resettle to Transcarpathia open: they have not sold their houses yet, their neighbours or family members cultivate their gardens, and except men of conscription age, they regularly travel home. However, as they say, the longer the war lasts, the less likely they will return.

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### Notes

- 1 Details on the projects are available at: <https://www.mtafki.hu/karpatalja/hprojektek.html>.
- 2 The participants of the Revolution of Dignity, who were killed by the security officers and their mercenaries, received the name of the "Heavenly Hundred." This denomination comes from the fact that officially 107 victims were killed in Kyiv during the Euromaidan protests in January–February 2014.
- 3 After 2014 a series of rights-restrictive legal measures were introduced by the Ukrainian state (e.g. laws on language use and the law on education), targeting mainly the use of the Russian language (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine n.d.). However other ethnic minorities, including the Hungarians, were also affected by these measures. These mostly meant restricting the use of the Hungarian language in public affairs, education, and media (Csernicskó and Kontra 2023).
- 4 The main measures of the Hungarian government launched in Ukraine were as follows: introduction of the extra-territorial preferential (re)naturalisation in 2010, salary supplement for those working for the benefit of the Hungarian community (like teachers, clergymen, journalists, etc.) since 2015, kindergarten and school development programmes since 2017, and the "Ede Egán" Economic Development Program (2016–2020).
- 5 The SUMMA 2017 survey intended to assess the number of ethnic Hungarians in Transcarpathia (see details in Tátrai et al. 2018). Migration data, Hungary: <https://statinfo.ksh.hu/Statinfo/themeSelector.jsp?&lang=en>.
- 6 The Hungarian government implemented law amendments to prepare for the reception of tens of thousands of non-EU-member (preferentially Ukrainian) guest workers in 2016; furthermore, it organised free Hungarian language courses in Transcarpathia (Tátrai et al. 2017).
- 7 Based on the Soviet-Hungarian interstate agreement signed in 1963, former citizens of the Soviet Union can opt for pensions in Hungary if they can prove to have a residency in Hungary. By 2016, the number of such approved requests quadrupled. According to our interlocutors and word-of-mouth, a flourishing informal

business has developed close to the Ukrainian border to provide resident addresses for the applicants. Moreover, during the 2019 municipal elections, the press wrote about “Ukrainian vote tourists,” accusing local politicians of fraud in villages situated nearby the Hungarian-Ukrainian border, where the resident population doubled or tripled before election day.

- 8 In August 2023, approximately 31,885 Ukrainian citizens were registered with temporary protection status. Their number is slightly decreasing due to diverse movements: some of them went back to Ukraine or migrated further to Western Europe (Urbán 2023), but detailed data on them is missing.
- 9 Migration statistics in Hungary do not include data on migrants’ ethnic affiliation. Migration records are based on the establishment of residency (permanent or temporary address).
- 10 The “country of birth” category does not necessarily reflect the actual country of birth. In our case, there is no correlation between the country of birth of those born before 1991 being the Soviet Union and those born after 1991 being Ukraine, but these categories are intermixed. In addition, among Hungarian citizens born in the Soviet Union, a large number, mainly non-Hungarians, were born in other areas of the former Soviet Union. Accordingly, Hungarian citizens born in the Soviet Union were not included in the analysis of Transcarpathian Hungarians.

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