

# Chapter 14

## Diaspora Policies, Consular Services and Social Protection for Hungarian Citizens Abroad



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### 14.1 Introduction

This chapter has two main objectives. First, it presents the general institutional framework by which Hungarian authorities interact with ethnic kin communities and nationals abroad, as well as the engagement policies with this population abroad outside of the area of social protection. Second, it offers an overview of the policies, programmes and services offered by the home country authorities to respond to the social protection needs of nationals abroad. The chapter argues that Hungarian policies for nationals and ethnic kin communities abroad primarily focus—in line with the nationalizing discourse and policies of the current Government—on culturally and politically engaging this population and on strengthening their national identity, while the effects of these policies in terms of social protection are less characteristic.

### 14.2 Diaspora Characteristics and Home Country Engagement

#### *14.2.1 The Hungarian Diaspora and Its Relation with the Homeland*

When talking about diaspora and nationals abroad in the case of Hungary, it has to be emphasised that the group of Hungarian citizens abroad is not only composed of emigrants, but it also includes a large number of ethnic Hungarians who were born

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abroad, and who might or might not be naturalized Hungarian citizens without residency in Hungary. A significant Hungarian minority lives in Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania and Serbia, due to the border changes of the twentieth century. The historic Hungary disintegrated in 1920, and, thus, Hungarian minority communities were created in neighbouring countries (Bárdi 2004). Today, 460,000 Hungarians live in Slovakia, 150,000 in Ukraine, 1.2 million in Romania, and 254,000 in Serbia (Kapitány 2015). They are eligible for preferential naturalization and thus can be Hungarian citizens without residency in Hungary since 2011.

Emigration from Hungary is hard to quantify (Blaskó 2015). National statistical data provided by home and host countries capture only one side of a transnational relation. In Hungary, nationals who emigrate officially are obliged to register their emigration with the Government's office or with the consulate,<sup>1</sup> although only a marginal proportion of emigrants do so. For example, official Hungarian statistical data suggest that the number of Hungarians leaving Hungary in 2012 was under 15,000, while mirror statistics from receiving countries showed almost 80,000 new Hungarian immigrants that year (Blaskó et al. 2014, 353). Host countries apply different methods to monitor their immigrants: some countries define immigrants by citizenship, while others do so by place of birth. The same methodological concern applies for the UN, the World Bank or OECD,<sup>2</sup> which usually include people who were born in Hungary decades ago, or left the country as children (e.g. after the 1956 revolution). Another problematic point refers to seasonal or commuter workers whose number is also difficult to estimate, and the unharmonised methodology of statistics makes it impossible to compare the number of Hungarian nationals abroad in the host countries.

The emigration potential in Hungary has been constantly growing since 1990. It peaked in 2012, then decreased until 2014. Since 2014, the migration potential of Hungarians has been fluctuating between 9% and 11% (Sík and Szeitl 2016). In addition, European statistics indicate that since 2012, around 100,000 people have left Hungary every year to move to other (mostly Western European) countries (Blaskó and Gödri 2014).

In 2013, an unconventional research project carried out by the Hungarian Statistical Office aimed to provide a more precise estimate of the number of Hungarians abroad by focusing on households. The research found that, at the beginning of 2013, there were 350,000 Hungarian nationals living abroad. Emigrants from Hungary are overwhelmingly young people: 25% of them are under 30 and 63% are under 40 years. Emigrants have a higher level of education than the national average. The majority of recent emigrants live in European Union (EU) countries,

<sup>1</sup>The obligation concerns only those who emigrate permanently; those who plan to work abroad only temporarily are not obliged to register. In practice, however, many emigrants who plan to work abroad temporarily end up staying in a foreign country for several years or even decades.

<sup>2</sup>“A SEEMIG – *Managing Migration in South East Europe transznacionális együttműködési projekt* „ Helyzetkép a magyarországi elvándorlásról” című sajtótájékoztatójának sajtóanyaga.” 2014. [https://www.ksh.hu/docs/szolgaltatasok/sajtoszoba/seemig\\_sajto\\_reszletes.pdf](https://www.ksh.hu/docs/szolgaltatasok/sajtoszoba/seemig_sajto_reszletes.pdf) Accessed 6 April 2018.

with the top three host countries being Germany, the United Kingdom (UK) and Austria.<sup>3</sup>

Since 2011, Hungarians without permanent residency in Hungary have been eligible to apply for Hungarian citizenship. This means that members of the Hungarian minority communities in the neighbouring countries have been able to obtain Hungarian nationality.<sup>4</sup> To do so, they must prove former legal ties to Hungary (at least one of the applicant's ancestors must have been, at some point, a Hungarian citizen) and familiarity with the Hungarian language. Since 2011, roughly one million people have obtained Hungarian citizenship, most of them from the neighbouring countries.<sup>5</sup> Thus, programmes and policies for residents abroad need to be interpreted within this enlarged context, as the target group of these policies can include recent emigrants, members of the Hungarian minorities in the neighbouring countries, as well as descendants of emigrants who had their Hungarian citizenship verified (e.g., second, third or further generations of Hungarian emigrants who left the country after World War II or the 1956 revolution).

### 14.2.2 *Diaspora Infrastructure*

In Hungary, there is no authority exclusively dedicated to emigration or emigrants' affairs, although the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade is responsible for engaging with nationals abroad. More specifically, the Department of Consular and Citizenship Issues (*Konzuli és Állampolgársági Főosztály*) within the ministry offers consular protection services to nationals abroad and administrates Hungary's consular network. Hungary has 115 consulates and 244 honorary consuls around the world. As a main rule, consulates are to be found at the places where the diplomatic missions (embassies) of Hungary are located. However, there are special cases when additional consular missions are established: (1) if the geographical distances of the state accounts for multiple consulates (e.g., United States of America (USA) or Brazil); (2) if nationals travel to places in the host country that are far from the capital (e.g., Turkey or Spain) and; (3) if a considerable number of Hungarians live in a concentrated area of the host state (e.g., Romania, Slovakia or Serbia) (Symmons 2010).

Mobile consular services also exist, although the legal framework regulating them is not public. From personal communication with consular employees, it can be assumed that a state secretary-level decree provides the legal background for

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<sup>3</sup> See footnote 2.

<sup>4</sup> See Section 4 Subsection (3) of the law on Hungarian citizenship: [http://eudo-citizenship.eu/National\\_DB/docs/HUN%20Act%20LV%20of%201993%20\(as%20of%20Jan%202009,%20English\).pdf](http://eudo-citizenship.eu/National_DB/docs/HUN%20Act%20LV%20of%201993%20(as%20of%20Jan%202009,%20English).pdf)

<sup>5</sup> *Új magyar állampolgárok - Változások az egyszerűsített honosítási eljárás bevezetése után* (2017). Központi Statisztikai Hivatal. <http://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xftp/idoszaki/pdf/ujmagyarallampolgarok.pdf>. Accessed 26 February 2019.

such services. In practice, mobile consular services are to be found occasionally in countries with a large Hungarian population (neighbouring countries, USA, Canada, Australia), and the focus of these services is to assist in citizenship applications. Thus, these services are primarily helpful for Hungarians abroad without Hungarian citizenship, and not for emigrant nationals.

The State Secretariat for Hungarian Communities Abroad (*Nemzetpolitikai Államtitkárság*) within the Prime Minister's Office is in charge with engaging with Hungarians abroad. It coordinates the relations between Hungarian authorities and Hungarian communities abroad and manages the support that the Hungarian state grants for Hungarian communities abroad. In this case, 'Hungarians abroad' (*külföldi magyarok*, which translates as 'Hungarians in the external homeland') refer to Hungarian minority communities in the neighbouring countries, and established older Hungarian diaspora groups in the West, regardless of whether or not the members of these communities have Hungarian citizenship. The concept of Hungarians abroad is included in Hungary's Constitution. Article D of the Fundamental Law states that "Hungary shall bear responsibility for the fate of Hungarians living beyond its borders, shall facilitate the survival and development of their communities, shall support their efforts to preserve their Hungarian identity, the effective use of their individual and collective rights, the establishment of their community self-governments, and their prosperity in their native lands, and shall promote their cooperation with each other and with Hungary".<sup>6</sup> The State Secretariat does not deal extensively with recent emigrants' affairs; the only exemption is the increasing support of Hungarian Sunday schools in the newly emerging Hungarian communities in Western Europe and other places.

There is no consultative body for nationals living abroad. However, there are several consultation bodies for representatives of Hungarians living abroad who are not necessarily citizens. First, the Hungarian Standing Conference (*Magyar Állandó Értekezlet*) is the consultative forum for Hungarians abroad (primarily those living in neighbouring countries) and the representatives of the Hungarian Parliament and Government. The participants of the conference are the political representatives of Hungarians abroad (national, and/or provincial level). In the case of the Western Hungarian diaspora where there are no ethnic Hungarian parties, the major cultural and civil organisations are invited. Second, the Hungarian Diaspora Council (*Magyar Diaszpóra Tanács*) was created with the aim to provide a consultative forum for representatives of the Western Hungarian diaspora and the Hungarian Government. It is very similar to the Hungarian Standing Conference, although it serves as the consultation body for the Western Hungarian diaspora and the Hungarian Government. Third, the Forum of the Hungarian Representatives in the Carpathian Basin (*Kárpát-medencei Magyar Képviselek Fóruma*), created in 2004, originally substituted for the Hungarian Standing Conference in the years when the latter was not convened for political reasons. It is the Hungarian Parliament's

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<sup>6</sup>The Fundamental Law of Hungary. <http://www.kormany.hu/download/e/02/00000/The%20New%20Fundamental%20Law%20of%20Hungary.pdf>. Accessed 9 October 2018.

consultative forum with elected national, provincial or county-level representatives of Hungarians abroad (Kántor 2013). None of these consultation bodies have a binding relation with the state. The issues raised at these fora should be regarded as guidelines in the Parliament's and the Government's decision making in areas concerning Hungarians abroad. However, the Hungarian state is not legally obliged to consult these bodies.

### **14.2.3 Key Engagement Policies**

Although recent emigration has been receiving great attention in the public sphere, Hungarian policy makers have not really addressed the post-2008 emigration trends from the country. On the other hand, Hungarian minority communities abroad and established diaspora communities represent a pivotal concern for the current administration.

Generally speaking, the state's responsibility towards nationals abroad is regulated by the Act XLVI of 2001 on Consular Protection (2001. évi XLVI. törvény a konzuli védelemről) and the implementing ministerial decree on the detailed rules on consular protection (17/2001. (XI. 15.) KÜM rendelet a konzuli védelem részletes szabályairól). The legal framework does not differentiate between nationals temporarily or permanently residing abroad. The law on consular protection refers to the consul's responsibility to help Hungarian nationals abroad in danger returning to Hungary. The right to consular protection is a constitutional right of all citizens. The consul helps and supports the repatriation process of a citizen that is in trouble by providing a new passport if needed; provides advice for the return journey; provides assistance to secure the amount needed for the return journey and provides a consular loan to facilitate prompt return journey if the citizen is in grave financial situation. Consulates can provide consular loans to nationals abroad only in cases of emergency. The Hungarian legal framework does not differentiate between the reasons of when repatriation is needed. Although by default the consular loan has to be repaid, exceptions can be made in exceptional cases, due to the social-financial situation of the citizen concerned.<sup>7</sup> If the loan is not repaid by the specified deadline, the consulate turns to the tax authority to collect the loan in form of tax. The Minister of Foreign Affairs needs to give consent to provide a loan that exceeds 200 Euros. The policy applies for nationals abroad, regardless of their state of residence. In case of natural disasters, war or armed conflict, consulates take measures to inform and inquire about Hungarian citizens affected and continuously evaluate the situation. The website of the Hungarian Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Trade offers a general overview on the information about consular services and consular protection. Another source of information for Hungarians abroad is the site of the Hungarians Abroad (*Külhoni Magyarok*), although this page is not dedicated to

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<sup>7</sup>This is a discretionary decision of the consulate, the law does not define the criteria.

recent emigrants but rather to Hungarian minorities abroad and established Hungarian diaspora communities. The website is a comprehensive information site about news regarding Hungarians abroad, diaspora organisations and projects and funds available for Hungarian organisations abroad.

Voting from abroad is potentially the most relevant right for nationals residing abroad. The conditions for exercising this right depend on the individual's residency in Hungary. Two types of voting from abroad exist because of the above-mentioned nationality law that allows Hungarians abroad to obtain Hungarian citizenship without permanent residence in Hungary. In the first case, if the citizen abroad has a permanent Hungarian address,—which is the case for those recent emigrants who did not register their emigration with Hungarian authorities—he/she is included in the National Electoral Register, and hence allowed to vote at every type of elections (national, local, or European Parliament elections held in Hungary). Although officially all citizens are obliged to de-register when they emigrate from Hungary, in practice, most of them do not. The most likely reason behind that is that they simply do not know for how long they will stay abroad, and therefore do not want to terminate their “ties” (residency, health insurance, etc.) in Hungary. If a citizen wants to cast their vote abroad, he/she must submit a claim to be included in the Foreign Representation Electoral Register (*Külképviseleti névjegyzék*), at least 8 days before the elections. At the national elections, citizens can cast two votes: one for a party list and one for the electoral district's representative. Citizens living abroad can vote in person at Hungary's diplomatic missions, and they can cast both their party list and individual candidate votes.

In the second case, if a citizen does not have residency in Hungary (mostly Hungarians living in neighbouring countries who became Hungarian citizens with the preferential naturalization process after 2010, but also emigrants who de-registered when they emigrated), he/she must file a claim to be enrolled in the National Electoral Register, at least 15 days before the elections. As they do not have a permanent address in Hungary, they cannot cast a vote for an individual candidate (who technically represents the electoral district where their voters reside). For this reason, citizens without residency in Hungary, unlike citizens with residency in Hungary, have only one vote, which they cast on a party list. Furthermore, whereas citizens without residency in Hungary can vote by mail or in person at Hungary's diplomatic missions, nationals abroad who have residency in Hungary can only vote in person at Hungary's diplomatic missions.

Education for nationals abroad is not organised through a national strategy or policy. It is rather primarily provided by diaspora organisations, usually in the form of Sunday schools or through other diaspora institutions. Since 2018, Sunday schools in the diaspora have been eligible to apply for financial help from the Bethlen Gábor Fund (*Bethlen Gábor Alapkezelő*), which is the public fund in charge of providing financial support for Hungarian communities abroad. In certain countries, Hungarian cultural institutes also offer Hungarian language courses. Note, however, that these language services are not exclusively offered for nationals residing abroad, but for diaspora members in general, and for other nationals interested in learning the Hungarian language. Moreover, Hungarian schools in the

neighbouring countries (i.e., not emigrant, but autochthonous minority communities) also receive financial support from the Hungarian Government.

Other engagement policies mainly focus on the diaspora's cultural life and identity, and include support for diaspora organisations and cultural revitalisation projects. All diaspora institutions and organisations are allowed to apply for financial help from the Bethlen Gábor Fund. The funds can be used for the creation, development and maintenance of such organisations. All of the available funds and grants are listed on the website of the Bethlen Gábor Fund. Note, however, that the grant and fund applications do not require the applicant to be a citizen of Hungary as they are open to all Hungarians living abroad. Furthermore, Hungary offers a scholarship (*Kőrösi Csoma Sándor Ösztöndíj*) in the framework of which young Hungarians travel to diaspora communities to help out in their work for 6–9 months. The tasks of the scholarship recipients include language teaching, folk tradition instructions and community life organisations. Another diaspora project (the Mikes Kelemen Program) focuses on the physical heritage of Hungarian diaspora groups. The programme offers a scholarship for Hungarian librarian and archival experts and finances their trip to overseas Hungarian communities to collect and process unused personal collections (books, magazines, other written materials) that enrich the cultural heritage of Hungarians worldwide. Hungary also offers various scholarships for young Hungarians abroad to study in Hungary, as well as birthright-type programmes (Pogonyi 2013). Young Hungarians born and raised in the diaspora can study the Hungarian language in Budapest with a scholarship offered by the Balassi Institute, and there are short heritage trips available for young people of Hungarian ancestry offered by the ReConnect Hungary project<sup>8</sup> and the *Rákóczi Szövetség*.<sup>9</sup> Citizenship is usually not an eligibility criterion to participate in these projects.

Currently, there is no program to facilitate return migration. However, such a program called “Come home, young people!” (*Gyere haza, fiatal!*) operated for only one (pilot) year between 2015 and 2016. It targeted Hungarian emigrants in England. Applicants could apply for travel and housing costs reimbursements.

### 14.3 Diaspora Policies and Social Protection in Hungary

Because its welfare system is primarily residence-based, Hungary does not offer a comprehensive social policy for nationals abroad. Many of the social allowances in Hungary, such as invalidity benefits or unemployment benefits, are handled by the local government or district offices. Therefore, nationals residing abroad are not entitled to apply for such benefits. The social benefits that are available for nationals residing abroad include pensions, family-related benefits, and, to a certain extent, healthcare. The authority that is in charge of social allowances is the Ministry of

<sup>8</sup> See: <http://reconnecthungary.org/>. Accessed 06 April 2020.

<sup>9</sup> See: <http://archiv.rakocziszovetseg.org/en/diaszporaprogram/home>. Accessed 06 April 2020.

Human Capacities (*Emberi Erőforrások Minisztériuma*). Within this Ministry, there are three State Secretariats responsible for social policies: The State Secretariat for Family and Youth Issues (*Család- és ifjúságügyért Felelős Államtitkárság*), the State Secretariat for Healthcare (*Egészségügyért Felelős Államtitkárság*), and the State Secretariat for Social Issues (*Szociális Ügyekért Felelős Államtitkárság*).

In the five social policy areas of interest for this book (unemployment, healthcare, pensions, family-related benefits, economic hardship), consulates may indirectly help nationals abroad to access these social benefits offered by the host country. The legal framework vaguely refers to the consulate's responsibility to gather information in the host country and to provide information to nationals abroad. In practice, based on the information available on the websites of the consulates in the top five host countries for Hungarian nationals (Germany, USA, UK, Canada and Austria), consulates offer information about the host country's social allowances to a varying extent.

### ***14.3.1 Unemployment***

As indicated above, most social benefits in Hungary are handled by local governments, and thus access to them requires residency in Hungary. This rule also applies for unemployment benefits that are available for residents only. According to the EU legislation, however, Hungarian nationals who move abroad in search for work and are otherwise entitled to unemployment benefits in Hungary, can continue receiving these benefits from Hungary for 3–6 months after moving abroad. Beyond the EU framework, there is no specific policy to assist Hungarians residing abroad to access Hungarian unemployment benefits, and consulates have no outlined role in facilitating or assisting Hungarians in claiming such benefits. The mission of consulates is limited to the provision of information. They may assist nationals in providing information and advice about the host country authorities, available social benefits in the host country, and the regulations on foreigners' employment in the host country.

### ***14.3.2 Health Care***

The legal framework on healthcare eligibility is provided by the 1997 Act LXXXIII on Health Insurance Services (*1997. évi LXXXIII. törvény a kötelező egészségbiztosítás ellátásairól*). By default, individuals are eligible for healthcare services in the state where they are insured. In practice, two cases have to be distinguished, depending on whether the national abroad terminates or not his/her residency in Hungary.

In the first case, Hungarian residents living abroad that have health insurance in their host countries do not have to pay for health insurance in Hungary if the host country falls under Regulation (EC) No 883/2004 on the coordination of social



security systems or under bilateral social security agreements. If a Hungarian national becomes insured in the host country, he/she has to report that to the Hungarian National Tax and Customs Administration within 15 days, and then their obligation to pay health insurance tax in Hungary ceases. In such cases, non-resident nationals are eligible to basic healthcare service in Hungary via their European Health Insurance Card. However, if a national fails to report his/her residency and insurance status abroad to the Hungarian authorities, they will be treated in Hungary as citizens who are obliged to pay the Hungarian health insurance. Those who fail to do so can be fined. If a Hungarian national resides in a host country that did not enter into a bilateral social security agreement with Hungary, that national is obliged to pay their healthcare tax in Hungary and thus keeps his/her insured status, regardless of the fact that he/she is insured in another country, and he/she is entitled to health care services when visiting Hungary. For instance, this is the case with the USA; as Hungary does not have a bilateral social security agreement with the USA, those Hungarian nationals who have not terminated their residency in Hungary and are living in the USA, are obliged to pay health insurance in both countries.

In the second case, if the national abroad has terminated his/her residency in Hungary, he/she does not pay health insurance in Hungary and is not insured in the home country.

In addition to the general health insurance, there are two other types of health benefits that could be relevant for nationals living abroad: the rehabilitation benefit (*rehabilitációs ellátás*) and the disability benefit (*rokkantsági ellátás*). Both benefits are applicable for persons whose working capacity is assessed at 60% or less, and who have or have had health insurance in Hungary (for at least 1095 days within 5 years, 2555 days within 10 years or 3650 days within 15 years before submitting the claim). People who can be rehabilitated are eligible for the rehabilitation benefit for the period of the rehabilitation process, up to 3 years. People with changed working capacity who cannot be rehabilitated or who reach retirement age within 5 years are eligible for the disability benefit. The amount of the benefits depends on the state of health, and they vary between 35% and 70% of the average monthly income.<sup>10</sup> Nationals living abroad can claim the rehabilitation or disability benefit if they are eligible according to the conditions defined by the Act CXCI of 2011 on the amendment of acts on benefits for persons with changed working capacity (*2011. évi CXCI. törvény a megváltozott munkaképességű személyek ellátásairól és egyes törvények módosításáról*), Regulation (EC) No 883/2004 on the coordination of social security systems or by other bilateral social security agreements. The claims submitted by nationals living abroad are handled exclusively by the District 3 Office of the Government Office of the Capital City Budapest.

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<sup>10</sup>Your social security rights in Hungary (2018). European Commission - Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=13766&langId=en>. Accessed 26 February 2019.

### 14.3.3 Pensions

The main legal framework for pensions is provided by the Act LXXXI of 1997 on social security pension benefits and its implementing decree (1997. évi LXXXI. törvény a társadalombiztosítási nyugellátásról). The home country authority that is in charge of state pensions (including international pension issues) is the Central Administration of National Pension Insurance (*Országos Nyugdíjbiztosítási Főigazgatóság*). The retirement age in Hungary is 65 (62 prior to 2010). Partial pension is paid after 15 active years, and full pension after 20 years of contribution. A non-contributory old-age allowance is granted to those who do not qualify for the minimum contributory years (Illés and Gellér-Lukács 2017).

Since 2013, nationals abroad can receive their pension benefits in different ways. They can authorise a legal representative who is a resident in Hungary to receive the benefit on the beneficiary's behalf. The authorized representative can receive the pension via postal delivery or bank transfer to a bank account managed by a Hungarian service provider. The second possibility is for the national abroad to open a bank account in Hungary or in an EU or European Economic Area (EEA) country and receive the pension on that bank account. Opening a bank account via mail (i.e., without traveling to Hungary) is available with one bank service provider, *Erste Bank Hungary Zrt*. The third possibility applies for Hungarian nationals who reside in a country with which Hungary has concluded a bilateral social security agreement (e.g., USA, Canada, Australia, India). In this case, they can receive the pension via bank transfer to a bank account in the host country, although transfer fees are applicable in this case. Payment via direct postal delivery is not possible for nationals living abroad. If the national's pension benefit is under the Hungarian old-age pension minimum (approx. 91 Euro/month in 2018), payment on a quarterly, bi-annual or annual basis posterior is also possible.<sup>11</sup>

Nationals living and receiving Hungarian pensions abroad need to present a yearly life certificate to the Central Administration of National Pension Insurance. This life certificate needs to be signed by the non-resident national and certified by the consulate. Beyond that, consulates are not involved in the process of state pension collection abroad. Consulates may assist nationals abroad in providing information about the regulations on pension collection, but there is no explicit obligation for them to do so. Similarly, consulates can provide information and advice about host country authorities, the available social benefits and regulations on non-nationals' social rights in the host country. Some of the Hungarian consulates in the top five host countries for Hungarian emigrants, including the London-based and Toronto-based consulates, provide information on their website about the host country's pension system.

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<sup>11</sup> Pension Payment Abroad – *Nyugdíjbiztosítás*. <https://nyugdijbiztositas.tcs.allamkinestar.gov.hu/en/international-pension-transaction/brochure-on-the-payment-of-benefit-for-beneficiaries-living-abroad.html>. Accessed 9 April 2018

### 14.3.4 Family-Related Benefits

Consulates provide services relating to new citizens' births abroad. The legal framework for such services is provided by the Act XLVI. of 2011 on Consular Protection (*2001. évi XLVI. törvény a konzuli védelemről*), and the Act I. of 2010 on birth registration process (*2010. évi I. törvény az anyakönyvi eljárásról*). Nationals residing abroad can initiate their children's birth registration at all Hungarian consulates. The registration is free of charge and the consulate is equipped to issue birth certificates. Similarly to birth registrations, consulates are equipped to register death and marriages (free of charge), and divorces (for consular fees) that occur in the host country.<sup>12</sup>

Since January 2018, the availability of two kinds of family benefits has been extended to nationals residing abroad: the maternity benefit (birth grant) and the life start benefit (baby bond).<sup>13</sup> Both can be applied for at all consulates or electronically. Some consulates provide information about family benefits eligibility for nationals residing abroad. The birth grant is a one-time payment of 64,125 HUF per child (approx. 205 euros). The life start benefit includes a one-time payment of 42,500 HUF (approx. 135 euros) paid by the Hungarian State Treasury to the newborn's account, and it is yearly increased with the inflation rate until the child is 18 years old. Parents of children born after June 30, 2017 are eligible for the benefits, provided that the baby has a Hungarian birth certificate. The consulates forward the applications to the Hungarian State Treasury, which accepts and processes the applications and issues the benefits. Besides the family benefits offered by Hungary that are available to nationals abroad, consulates can assist Hungarian nationals in providing information and advice about host country authorities and the available social benefits, including family benefits.

In February 2019, the Hungarian Government announced a new type of family-related benefit under the "Family Protection Action Plan". The details that have been announced so far suggest that women under 40 will be eligible to acquire a special low-interest governmental loan up to 10 million HUF. The repayment will be suspended after the birth of the first child, it will be partially cancelled after the birth of a second child, and will be completely cancelled after the birth of the third child. At the time of writing, the conditions of the benefit are still being discussed and it is therefore still uncertain whether or not this benefit will be made available to nationals living abroad.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup>*Konzuli Szolgálat*. <http://konzuliszolgalat.kormany.hu/ugyintezes-konzulnal>. Accessed 9 April 2018.

<sup>13</sup>*Elindult a határon túli családokat támogató Köldökzsínór program*. (2018). *Kormányzat*. <http://www.kormany.hu/hu/emberi-eroforrasok-miniszteriuma/csalad-es-ifjusagugyert-felelos-allamtitkarsag/hirek/elindult-a-hataron-tuli-csaladokat-tamogato-koldokzsinor-program>. Accessed 9 April 2018.

<sup>14</sup>The loan was launched for application in July 2019. Eventually, the defined terms for eligibility practically exclude nationals living abroad.

### 14.3.5 *Economic Hardship*

As discussed above, most social benefits in Hungary are handled by local governments, and thus access to them requires residency in Hungary. There is no Hungarian policy according to which Hungarian nationals residing abroad can access the guaranteed minimum resources scheme. Hungarians residing abroad cannot claim any Hungarian income-based benefits. There is no specific policy to assist Hungarians residing abroad access the welfare benefits of the host country in economic hardship, and consulates have no outlined role in facilitating or assisting Hungarians in claiming such benefits either. Beyond the consular loans discussed above, consulates may assist nationals in providing information and advice about the host country authorities and the available social benefits—including guaranteed minimum income schemes—in the host country.

Since 2017, an *ad hoc* type of social benefit has been provided by Hungary to certain individuals living in Transcarpathia, Ukraine, due to the economic hardship caused by the war in the country. Hungary offers financial support for individuals who work in the public sector and provide their service in the Hungarian language. Doctors and other health-care workers, teachers, journalists, librarians, and artists who work in institutions where the Hungarian language is used and who provide their services in Hungarian are entitled to apply for the social benefit. Thus, the benefit is available for everybody who provides their services in Hungarian, irrespective of their ethnicity and/or citizenship. The benefit is provided by the Budapest-based *Bethlen Gábor Alapkezelő Zrt*, the fund that handles all financial support for the kin minority and diaspora. The benefit can be applied for once or twice a year, depending on the applicant's work.

## 14.4 Conclusions

Hungary is the kin-state of large Hungarian minorities in its neighbouring countries, and the home country of a large, established Hungarian diaspora overseas and in Western Europe that came into being with the great emigration waves of the twentieth century. In addition to these older Hungarian communities abroad, Hungary has been an emigrant sending state in the last decades, with growing intensity over the past 10 years.

The current Hungarian Government pursues a nationalistic agenda in many policy areas, and emphasizes national survival and national interest in its discourse. The Government is known for its traditionally close relationship with Hungarian minority communities abroad and with older emigrant (diaspora) communities. Thus, the focus of its diaspora policy is primarily on these communities; it aims to engage these groups symbolically, culturally, and, through the introduction of dual citizenship, politically as well. However, the current Government has not really addressed the needs and interests of more recent emigrant communities, even though emigration from the country is an increasingly perceivable phenomenon.

This chapter clearly shows that policies to engage Hungarians abroad—those living in neighbouring countries and the established older diaspora (post-World War II and 1956 emigrants and their descendants), who are not necessarily Hungarian nationals—are more advanced and elaborated than engagement policies for recent emigrant nationals. Most of the engagement practices focus on cultural and identity strengthening issues, and not so much on the social protection of citizens abroad. As many of the social allowances in Hungary are handled by the local government or district offices, nationals residing abroad are not entitled to apply for such benefits.

The general policy to engage with nationals abroad is provided in the framework of consular services. Hungary has a dense consular network worldwide that is supplemented with honorary consuls. Consulates provide general consular help for nationals in need. They also provide registration services for nationals abroad (birth, marriage, divorce certificates), as well as identity documents. Consulates may provide information and advice for nationals abroad about the social rights offered by the host country.

In the field of social rights, there are three areas that are relevant for nationals abroad: healthcare, pensions and family benefits. There is no guaranteed minimal income or any kind of cash benefit available for nationals abroad. In the area of healthcare, certain benefits are available for nationals abroad who live in an EU country. Another distinctive case is if the national living abroad has not terminated his/her Hungarian residency, and thus he/she continues to pay health care tax and remains insured in Hungary. Pensions can be collected abroad rather easily in three different ways, and the process is clearly regulated in each case.

The newest social allowances that have been made available for nationals abroad in 2018 are the maternity benefit and the life start benefit (baby bond). Nationals abroad can apply for these one-time payments at all consulates. The introduction of these family benefits can be regarded as ground-breaking for two reasons. First, the current Hungarian Government has been very actively supporting Hungarian minority communities in the neighbouring countries and the old diaspora communities in the West, but has rather neglected newer, post-2008 emigrants. Second, the engagement policies have been focusing on cultural revitalization and on identity strengthening, but not so much on social protection. The introduction of the maternity benefit and the baby bond, and the fact that they are available for newer emigrant families as well, could indicate that the engagement practices of the Hungarian Government might slightly change in the future, and that the needs of newer emigrants will be taken into consideration more seriously. However, the maternity benefit and the baby bond policies are so recent that it is rather hard to assess whether they are signs of a new engagement direction, or just a one-time occurrence in extending social benefits for nationals abroad.

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