

Kecskés, Gusztáv D. *Globális humanitárius akció a hidegháború idején - Az 1956-os magyar menekültek nemzetközi befogadása* [Global Humanitarian Action during the Cold War: The International Reception of the Hungarian Refugees of 1956]. Budapest: HUN-REN Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont, Történettudományi Intézet; Nemzeti Emlékezet Bizottsága, 2025. 320 pp.

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The author is a diligent researcher of the Hungarian refugee crisis and the author or editor of many important publications in this field in Hungarian and English. Outstanding among these to date have been *Egy világraszóló történet: Az 1956-os magyar menekültválság kézikönyve* [A Story that Speaks to the World: A Handbook of the 1956 Hungarian Refugee Crisis], coedited with Tamás Scheibner (2022, soon to appear also in English), and *Humanitarian Campaign on a Global Scale: The International Red Cross and the 1956 Hungarian Refugees* (2024, downloadable from the website of the Wilson Center in Washington, DC.). Since July 2024, Kecskés has been chair of a research group on Hungary and the United Nations.

The trials and adventures of the roughly 200,000 Hungarian refugees (mostly to Austria, but a smaller number to Yugoslavia) have been told many times by journalists and refugees; the names and biographies of the most important political leaders are well known. The unique merit of this work is to detail the structure and role of the major international organizations that "processed" the refugees and directed the work of these organizations' staff. At the center of this organizational landscape was the United Nations: its Secretariat in New York City and its High Commissioner for Refugees in the Palace of Nations in Geneva. With the outbreak of the Revolution and its suppression by the Soviet Union, Deputy Secretary General Philippe de Seynes took on the direction of *Relief to the Hungarian People*, which meant both aid shipments to Hungary and assistance to the refugees. De Seynes assigned refugee relief to the High Commissioner or UNHCR. This delineation of roles was not always easy, but the UNHCR gained the grudging appreciation of the great powers. The High Commissioner's office assumed an accepted role in the legal protection of refugees and its pragmatic application through the coordination of governments and aid agencies. The UNHCR established a working relationship

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with the post-revolutionary Kádár regime, despite the latter’s preference for repatriation over resettlement, for at least a few years. This very positive assessment of the U.N. stands in contrast to the works of András Nagy, not mentioned by Kecskés, that highlight contradictions in U.N. policy toward Hungary, including *Halálos együttérzés: A “magyar ügy” és az ENSZ, 1956–1963* [Deadly Sympathy: The “Hungarian Cause” and the U.N., 1956–1963] (2020). An English translation of this book is forthcoming with Indiana University Press in November 2025.

Resettlement required the engagement of the International Committee for European Migration (ICEM), established in 1951, with the exclusion of the Soviet bloc powers. Despite this affiliation with one side of the Cold War, the ICEM established excellent relations with the UNHCR and with the governments of neutral Austria and non-aligned Yugoslavia for the registration, counselling, and finally the transportation of the refugees to the countries of resettlement. Today, the successor of the ICEM is the International Organization for Migration, IOM.

The author turns next to the Red Cross. This organization has existed since 1864, with the seat of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva. In 1919, the organization was bifurcated with the creation of the League of Red Cross Societies, with periodic conflict between the two parts over their roles and responsibilities. As in the case of the UN’s *relief to the Hungarian people*, role delineation in 1956–57 was initially difficult. The solution was found in the assignment of aid for Hungary to the International Committee and the management of refugee camps in Austria to the League. The League, for its part, assigned the management of four-fifths of the camps in Austria to individual national societies, which in turn provided their supplies and staff; the remaining camps were the province of the Austrian government and other agencies. A key additional role of the International Committee was its tracing service, on the model of the POW service previously managed by the Red Cross, based on a card file identifying Hungarian refugees, which eventually comprised 110,000 persons and required extraordinarily disinterested diplomacy to respect the interests of the refugees themselves and resistance by the Austrian Ministry of the Interior.

A final component of the organizational landscape traced by the author is the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “the invisible player.” NATO anticipated, as a byproduct of international conflict, the flight of refugees to the West, hence, the anticipated management of this flow became a part of its planning process. NATO, ICEM, and the UNHCR consulted during the Hungarian crisis, but agreed that their consultation be kept a secret to minimize negative publicity. The author mentions in passing the involvement of the Council of Europe in the arrangement of refugee relief. It would be helpful to give more attention to the public statements of the European deputies to the deliberations in Strasbourg.

Kecskés argues convincingly that the successful collaboration of the major international organizations was crucial to the mastering of the crisis within roughly a year, and stresses that the financial support by the US government was essential. The UN-managed press releases and communications are carefully documented. It should be noted that other agencies also actively engaged in communications and fundraising. The religiously oriented international and national non-governmental organizations of the Catholics, Protestants, Jews, and non-sectarian groups played a smaller role than the organizations mentioned in this book but would merit more attention. They provided many volunteers and dedicated staff in the refugee camps, in transit, and especially in the countries of resettlement.

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This work is the careful synthesis of many years’ research in the archives of the United Nations, the International Organization for Migration, the Red Cross, NATO, the National Archives of the U.S., U.K., Hungary, and other repositories. Meticulous documentation of the sources for assertions may be found appropriately in footnotes (not endnotes!) on every page. The valuable eighteen-page bibliography also lists various source and secondary publications. Indexes of personal names and places are valuable additions.