

In search of a better life?

Well-being and Migration:
The Hungary-Austria Nexus



Borbála Göncz,
György Lengyel,
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Corvinus University of Budapest, 2026

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**MIGWELL – Well-being and Migration: the Hungary – Austria Migration
Nexus**

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Table of content

Authors	11
Further project members	13
Part One – Introduction	15
1. Why study subjective well-being in the context of migration?	15
2. The Austria-Hungary migration nexus	17
2.1. Migration dynamics in Austria	17
2.2. Hungarians in Austria	19
3. The well-being gap between Austria and Hungary	23
Part Two – Main concepts and methodology	25
4. Linking subjective well-being and migration:	
a theoretical framework	25
4.1. Conceptual framework of well-being	25
4.2. Migration theories relevant to the project	28
4.3. The subjective well-being – migration nexus	33
5. Research approach and methodology	36
5.1. Research approach	36
5.2. Methodology and data	39
5.3. Analytical groups and sample sizes	45
Part Three – Research results	47
6. Migration as a multi-stage process	47
6.1. Migration plans in Hungary	48
6.2. Motivations for migration among Hungarians living in Austria ..	53
7. Objective factors underlying well-being	56
7.1. Demographic and spatial characteristics	56
7.2. Financial situation	59
7.3. Economic status and job	64
7.4. Housing conditions	68
7.5. Household composition	69
7.6. Social connections	71
7.7. Health status	77
7.8. Work-life balance	79
7.9. External factors	80
8. Subjective well-being patterns among Hungarians living	
in Hungary and Austria	82
8.1. Overall life satisfaction	82
8.2. Domain satisfaction	83

8.3. Affective well-being	86
8.4. Eudaimonic well-being	88
8.5. Interrelations of different measures of subjective well-being	88
9. How does subjective well-being affect migration intentions in Hungary?	91
10. How does migration affect subjective well-being in Austria?	94
10.1. Migration and subjective well-being	94
10.2. Transnational ties and migration challenges	107
10.3. Overqualification	110
11. Considering return	116
12. Summary	118
12.1. Scope and approach	118
12.2. Austria–Hungary well-being gap	119
12.3. Effect of SWB on migration intentions in Hungary	121
12.4. Effects of migration on SWB in Austria	122
References	126

Tables

Table 1. Overall life satisfaction. National averages (on a 0-10 scale) in the EU-SILC countries in 2013, 2018 and 2022.	24
Table 2. Subjective well-being domains and their operationalisation using objective and subjective indicators.	37
Table 3. Description of analytical groups	46
Table 4. Average total personal income in Austria and Hungary (yearly, gross, EUR/per capita).	59
Table 5. Having people (not counting family members) with whom to discuss intimate and personal matters by analytical subgroup (%) ...	73
Table 6. Proportion of individuals able to ask for material or non-material help from relatives, friends, or neighbours by analytical subgroup	76
Table 7. Trust in institutions by analytical subgroup.	81
Table 8. Average domain satisfaction scores by analytical subgroup ...	85
Table 9. Affective SWB scores by analytical subgroup	87

Figures

Figure 1. Population by Top 10 countries of birth in Austria (2002-2024) . . .	19
Figure 2. Population stock of Hungarian-born people, Hungarian citizens, and Austrian citizens who mainly use the Hungarian language at home in Austria (1951-2025)	20
Figure 3. Population pyramid of Austrian-born (left) and Hungarian-born (right) people living in Austria (2022)	21
Figure 4. Hungarian-born population in regions of Austria (2002-2024) . . .	22
Figure 5. Share of Hungarian citizens in Austrian municipalities (2011 and 2025)	22
Figure 6. Migration plans and planned length of stay among those with migration intentions	50
Figure 7. Reasons to migrate among those with migration intentions . . .	51
Figure 8. Motivations for migration of Hungarians residing in Austria . . .	55
Figure 9. Average age of individuals in Hungary and Austria by analytical subgroup.	57
Figure 10. Share of individuals by degree of urbanisation of their place of residence in Hungary and Austria by analytical subgroup . . .	58
Figure 11. Distribution by income level of those planning to emigrate and those wanting to stay in Hungary.	60
Figure 12. Share of individuals according to highest level of education by analytical subgroup.	65
Figure 13. Share of individuals according to current economic status by analytical subgroup	66
Figure 14. Living together in Austria.	71
Figure 15. Trust in other people by analytical subgroup (mean values on a 0-10 scale).	75
Figure 16. Perceived health by analytical subgroup.	78
Figure 17. Overall life satisfaction by analytical subgroup.	83
Figure 18. Changes in different domains of satisfaction (perception of current situation vs. current perception of pre-migration situation) . . .	95

Figure 19. Changes in different domains of satisfaction (perception of current situation vs. current perception of pre-migration situation) (Boxplot – average values)	96
Figure 20. Changes in the affective elements of subjective well-being (perception of current situation vs. current perception of pre-migration situation)	98
Figure 21. Transnational activities and ties to Hungary of Hungarians living in Austria	109
Figure 22. Intentions to return to Hungary and assessment of migration success	118

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Part One – Introduction

1. Why study subjective well-being in the context of migration?

Although there is still no universal definition of happiness or life satisfaction, it is firmly believed that individuals usually act to improve their well-being and that this motivates their choices and actions (Selezneva 2011). From this perspective, voluntary migration can be considered a means of achieving the desired outcome of increased well-being. However, whereas a vast amount of literature examines the nexus of material life conditions and migration as well as the material and subjective aspects of well-being separately, the third vertex of this theoretical triangle, the link between subjective well-being (SWB) and migration, has only started attracting attention in recent years (e.g. OECD, 2017; Hendriks and Bartram, 2018; De Jong et al., 2002). Since very few international surveys are explicitly designed to measure migrants' well-being outcomes, little is still known about the consequences of migration for subjective well-being, particularly the effects of SWB on migration intentions and/or decisions.

Although intercontinental migration streams have intensified globally in recent decades, in Europe their intracontinental form has remained dominant (Németh and Sümeghy, 2018). The fall of the Iron Curtain and, later, EU enlargement created a unique situation: within a short period, high-wage labour markets became largely open to the labour force of low-wage countries. It is little surprise that the potential consequences of this, for both sending and receiving countries, have become a hot topic in the political arena and in academia since the 1990s (Rédei, 1994; Hárs, 2009).

Nevertheless, migration research remains dominated by the labour-market-driven assumptions of neoclassical models, and migration policy focuses on third-country nationals, overlooking the fact that intra-EU mobility is the dominant form of migration. The major shortcomings of contemporary well-being studies in the context of migration are as follows: (1) With few exceptions, international surveys do not include migrant-specific background variables. (2) Most conclusions are drawn from data relevant to developed countries, while research pertinent to transition countries is still rather sparse. (3) The relationship between migration and subjective well-being has only received attention in the past

couple of years and remains a seriously under-theorised topic. This new literature suffers from further pitfalls. It predominantly focuses on the effects of migration on SWB, yet we know little about the effects of SWB on migration intentions and decisions. It mainly uses cross-sectional data, concentrating on the host countries and neglecting the dynamic aspect, i.e., immigrants' SWB prior to migration. The objective of the MIGWELL (Well-being and Migration: The Hungary-Austria Migration Nexus) project was to explore the nexus between migration and well-being in Hungary and Austria and to address these shortcomings through quantitative and qualitative research methods.

This book summarises the findings of the project. It seeks to explore the impacts of migration on subjective well-being among Hungarian immigrants in Austria, as well as the effects of subjective well-being differences on emigration potential in Hungary. It links the concepts of 'well-being' and 'migration', but it also interprets their two-way relationship within one research framework.

In the following, Part One of the book, we provide an overview of migration trends in Hungary and Austria and situate these countries within a European context regarding perceived individual well-being (Chapter 2). We will then, in Part Two, present the project's theoretical framework and relevant concepts, along with the methodological approach (Chapters 4&5).

The results we present in Part Three are primarily based on data collected during the project. Our intention was to grasp migration as an integrated process across its different stages, starting from the intention to migrate through the migration experience to (potential) eventual return. We address the link between migration and well-being through this lens.

In what follows, we describe the results of a quantitative survey, presented primarily in a descriptive manner and complemented by multivariate analyses and causal models. In Chapter 6 we describe migration intentions and plans in Hungary and a recall of these motivations by Hungarian migrants living in Austria. In Chapters 7&8 objective and subjective measures of well-being are presented across different groups of interest, comparing Austria to Hungary, but also Hungarians willing to migrate and Hungarian migrants living in Austria. Chapters 9&10 explore how subjective well-being affects migration intentions, and how the former is shaped by the actual experience of migration. In Chapter 11 we briefly address the question of return intentions and its determinants, and finally provide a summary of our main findings (Chapter 12).

Throughout the book, the reader will also find excerpts from qualitative interviews conducted in preparation for the surveys to help interpret

ret and illustrate the quantitative results. Furthermore, to improve understanding and make the very rich but complex outcomes more accessible, many of the tables, graphs, and statistics are not included in the book but are provided in a numerical annexe¹, thereby allowing readers seeking greater detail to delve further. Similarly, in line with the principles of open science and transparency, we will share the survey data collected with the scientific community².

2. The Austria-Hungary migration nexus

In this chapter, we place the volume about the Hungary–Austria migration nexus into context by providing an overview of the Austrian immigration landscape, followed by a brief descriptive presentation of the Hungarian population stock in Austria. It is important to emphasise that the second deliverable of the MIGWELL project provided a detailed analysis of international migration patterns in and between Hungary and Austria (Németh et al., 2023). In this subchapter, we summarise only the most important demographic characteristics and spatial patterns of this target population, using 2022 as the reference point, as relevant to the project.

2.1. Migration dynamics in Austria

While Austria was primarily a country of emigration for decades, it gradually transformed into an immigration destination in the post-World War II period. Until the 1990s, immigration was largely driven by so-called “guest worker programmes”, which involved workers mainly from Türkiye and Yugoslavia. In response to industrial labour shortages, the Austrian government recruited foreign workers through bilateral agreements with these countries in 1963 and 1966, respectively. At the peak of this recruitment phase, annual arrivals in Austria reached around 35,000.

The 1973 oil crisis marked a turning point. The economic downturn coincided with profound societal changes associated with political reforms, including the legalisation of abortion, a growing share of women

1 The book and its annexes have been uploaded to: <https://doi.org/10.14267/978-963-503-982-1>

2 Project reports and the anonymised data from the survey carried out within the project, with documentation, will be made available at: https://zenodo.org/communities/migwell_project

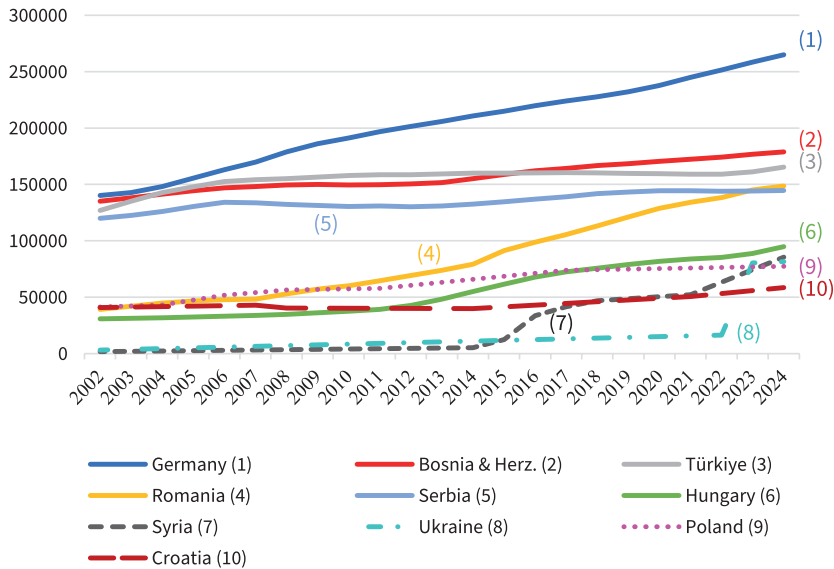
in the labour market, and rapidly increasing female educational attainment. During the 1970s, immigration slowed considerably, leading to a stagnation of the population at around 7.5 million. From the mid-1980s onwards, migration gradually increased again, primarily driven by family reunification.

The opening of the Eastern borders created a new situation. On the one hand, the recruitment of guest workers resumed in the early 1990s in response to labour shortages in the expanding Austrian economy. On the other hand, the number of asylum seekers increased substantially, with major refugee flows arriving from Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the second half of the 1990s, however, immigration declined again due to the introduction of more restrictive legal requirements concerning the employment and residence of foreign nationals. The rights of labour migrants residing in Austria improved following the country's accession to the European Union in 1995 and were further strengthened through the EU-wide harmonisation of migration and asylum policies – for instance, through the Amsterdam Treaty in 1999 and the Lisbon Treaty in 2009.

Migration flows began to rise again after the eastern enlargement of the European Union in 2004. However, Austria introduced transitional restrictions that denied citizens of the new EU Member States full access to the labour market and excluded them from protected sectors until 2011. For Romanian and Bulgarian nationals, these restrictions remained in place until 2013. Once these measures were lifted, immigration from the new EU Member States increased significantly.

A new wave of migration emerged in 2015 during the so-called “refugee crisis”. Between 2015 and 2017, Austria received approximately 156,000 asylum applications, with more than 77,000 individuals – mainly from Syria and Afghanistan – granted asylum. The arrival of refugees from the Middle East posed a new challenge, as these regions had previously played only a minor role in migration flows to the country. The Russo-Ukrainian War in 2022 triggered the most recent large-scale migration wave, with a significant share of immigrants fleeing Ukraine.

On 1 January 2025, approximately 2.08 million foreign-born people were living in Austria, accounting for 22.7% of the total population. This represents an increase of almost one million since 2002. Today, the largest groups of foreign-born residents originate from Germany, followed by Bosnia and Herzegovina, Türkiye, Romania, Serbia, and Hungary (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Population by Top 10 countries of birth in Austria (2002-2024)

Source: Statistics Austria, StatCube: Population Stock and Population Change:

<https://statcube.at/statistik.at/ext/statcube/jsf/dataCatalogueExplorer.xhtml>. Authors' figure.

2.2. Hungarians in Austria

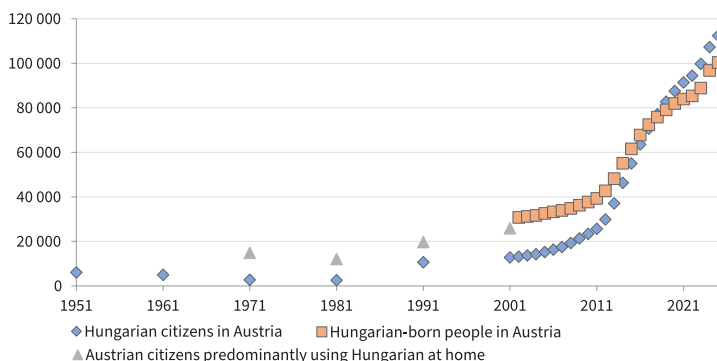
The Hungary–Austria migration nexus represents a stable migration corridor with deep historical roots (Melegh, 2012; Fassmann et al., 2014 etc.). The Cold War period constituted an exception, as very few people were able to migrate across the Iron Curtain, apart from refugees who fled Hungary following the 1956 revolution. The first Austrian census conducted after World War II recorded approximately 6,000 Hungarian citizens in the country. Between 1951 and 1981, their number declined to around 2,000, before quadrupling again by 1991.

Following a moderate increase during the first decade after the fall of the Iron Curtain, the number of Hungarian citizens and Hungarian-born residents in Austria began to grow more dynamically in the early 2000s. A key milestone was 2011, when Austria opened its labour market to workers from the new EU Member States (Gödri, 2016). Since then, the Hungarian-born population in Austria has doubled, while the number of Hun-

garian citizens living in the country has tripled, exceeding 94,000 by 2022³. Even the COVID-19 pandemic – despite causing major disruptions to global migration patterns and reducing immigration overall (González-Leonardo et al., 2023) – did not significantly slow this process (Zöldi et al., 2024). According to the most recent statistics, 100,360 Hungarian-born people were living in Austria as of 1 January 2025⁴.

It is important to emphasise, however, that this is not a unidirectional mobility process. According to migration flow data from Statistics Austria, the volume of migration from Austria to Hungary has also been substantial throughout the entire period of analysis. In 2024, for example, 12,823 people moved from Hungary to Austria, while 8,604 moved from Austria to Hungary. These figures illustrate the intensity of transnational and circular migration between the two countries. One contributing factor is that part of the workforce consists of seasonal workers (for instance, in tourism), who register and later deregister their residence in Austria each year.⁵

Figure 2. Population stock of Hungarian-born people, Hungarian citizens, and Austrian citizens who mainly use the Hungarian language at home in Austria (1951-2025)

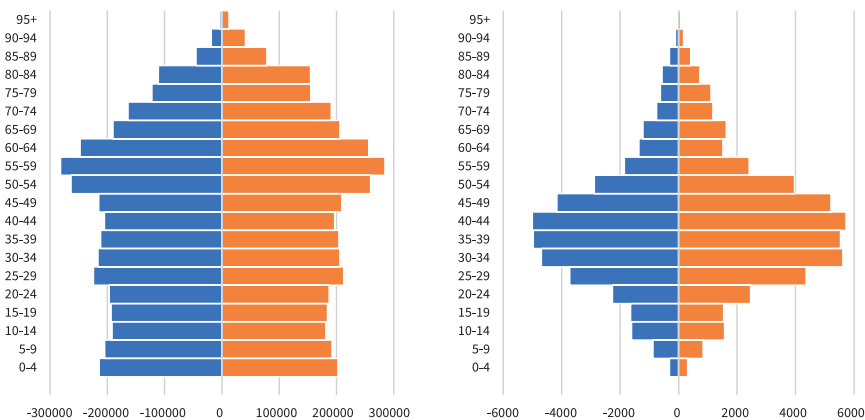


Source: Statistics Austria, StatCube: Population Stock and Population Change: <https://statcube.at/statistik.at/ext/statcube/jsf/dataCatalogueExplorer.xhtml>. Authors' figure.

- 3 According to United Nations estimates, in 2019, 632,000 Hungarian-born people were living abroad, a value that had increased by 64% over the previous three decades. The Hungarian emigrant stock (based on country-of-birth data) numbered approximately 387,000 in 1990, ca. 421,000 in 2000, and almost 514,000 in 2010. Nowadays, almost half of them live in Western Europe, but the USA (85,000) and Canada (39,000) are also among the most important destination countries (UN DESA 2019).
- 4 Although they fall outside the scope of this project, it is worth noting that the number of Hungarian cross-border commuters working in Austria exceeded 60,000 according to the 2022 population census (Horváth 2024).
- 5 It should also be noted that Austrian migration statistics record only the in- and out-migration of persons whose main residence is registered in Austria for at least 90 days.

Approximately 86% of Hungarian-born individuals hold Hungarian citizenship; however, only three-quarters of Hungarian nationals were born in Hungary. The human sex ratio is slightly biased toward females, with approximately 85 males per 100 females. Women outnumber men in all age groups over 20. The age-sex pyramid of Austrian-born individuals exhibits an “urn” shape. In contrast, the age-sex pyramid of Hungarian-born individuals displays a “diamond” shape, a pattern common among immigrant populations (Figure 3).

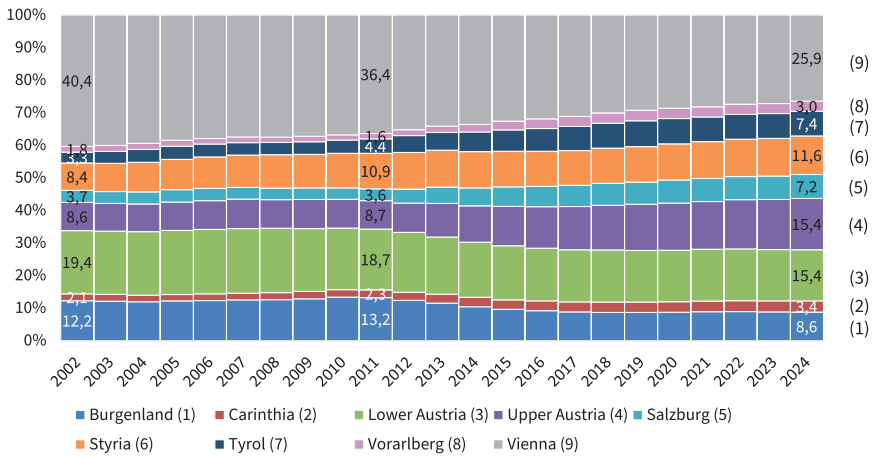
Figure 3. Population pyramid of Austrian-born (left) and Hungarian-born (right) people living in Austria (2022)



Source: Statistics Austria. Source: Statistics Austria, StatCube: Population Stock and Population Change: <https://statcube.at/statistik.at/ext/statcube/jsf/dataCatalogueExplorer.xhtml>. Authors' figure. Left: males, right: females. (n.b., note difference in scale on X-axis)

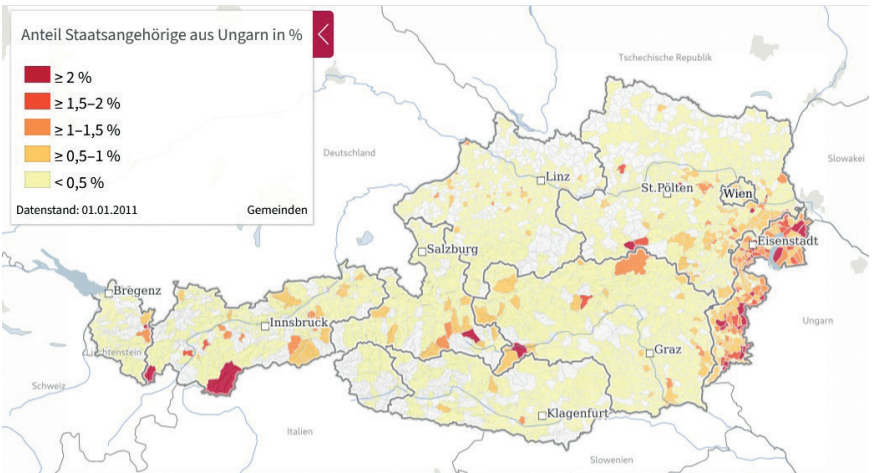
Over the past two decades, the spatial distribution of the Hungarian-born population in Austria has undergone significant changes. Although Vienna experienced the largest absolute increase – rising by 2,000 individuals between 2002 and 2011, and by nearly 11,000 more by 2024 – the capital now accounts for a smaller proportion of the Hungarian-born population than in the early 2000s. In 2002, nearly three-quarters of Hungarian-born residents were living in Vienna, Lower Austria, and Burgenland. Today, only about half reside in these eastern provinces. This shift is largely attributable to the rapid growth of Hungarian populations in other federal provinces, particularly Upper Austria (from approximately 3,000 to 15,000), Styria (from around 3,000 to 11,000), Salzburg, and Tyrol (each increasing from about 1,000 to 7,000) between 2002 and 2024.

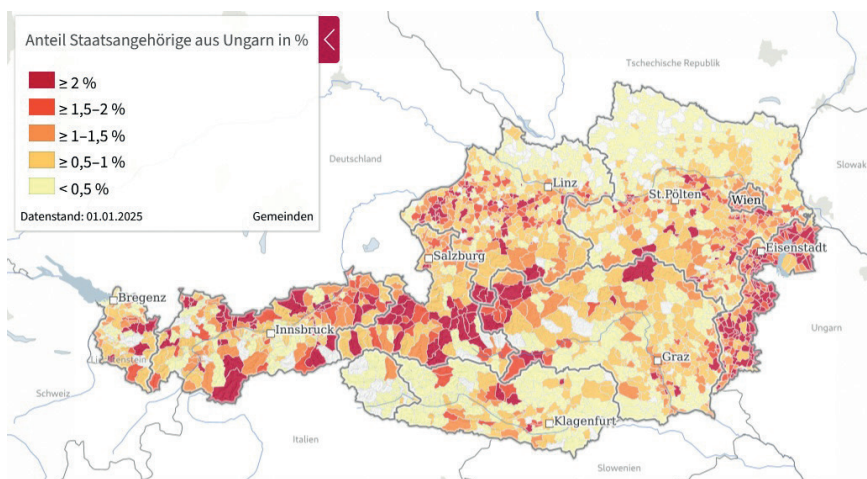
Figure 4. Hungarian-born population in regions of Austria (2002-2024)



Source: Statistics Austria, StatCube: Population Stock and Population Change:
<https://statcube.at/statistik.at/ext/statcube/jsf/dataCatalogueExplorer.xhtml>. Authors' figure.

Figure 5. Share of Hungarian citizens in Austrian municipalities (2011 and 2025)





Source: Statistics Austria, Link: https://www.statistik.at/atlas/?mapid=them_bevoelkerung_staatsangehoerigkeit&layerid=layer1&sublayerid=sublayer0&languageid=0&bbox=738088,5661575,2153090,6457743,7

3. The well-being gap between Austria and Hungary

Satisfaction with life as a whole is widely considered to be a key variable in well-being research. This variable is expected to encapsulate information about people's evaluations of their lives into a single number. Based on the 2013, 2018, and 2022 waves of EU-SILC surveys,⁶ among the 37 countries of the EU-SILC under analysis, Switzerland, Austria, and Finland accounted for the top three (scores above 7.8), while the lowest scores were measured in North Macedonia, Türkiye, Bulgaria, and Montenegro (below 6.0). While Austria was ranked first within the European Union, Hungary was ahead of five EU Member States. While earlier the national average values of overall life satisfaction gradually decreased from North to South and from West to East, by 2022 the pattern became less consistent, for example with a decline in the value for Germany and an improvement in the values for Poland and Romania.

⁶ EU-SILC (EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions) was launched in 2003 to collect timely, comparable, multidimensional microdata on income distribution, poverty, and social exclusion. EU-SILC is a representative sample survey of private households in the European Union. Indicators of subjective well-being were collected and published in the 2013 and 2018 ad hoc modules, as well as in 2022. However, the 2022 data were not yet available at the time of our analysis.

Table 1. Overall life satisfaction. National averages (on a 0-10 scale) in the EU-SILC countries in 2013, 2018 and 2022. (Grey: non-EU countries. NA: no data. United Kingdom: not part of the EU since 2021.)

	2013	2018	2022		2013	2018	2022
Albania	NA	5.5	6.0	Lithuania	6.7	6.4	7.1
Austria	7.8	8.0	7.9	Luxembourg	7.5	7.6	7.2
Belgium	7.6	7.6	7.6	Malta	7.1	7.5	7.4
Bulgaria	4.8	5.4	5.6	Montenegro	5.7	6.5	5.8
Croatia	6.3	6.3	6.8	Netherlands	7.8	7.7	7.7
Cyprus	6.2	7.1	7.1	North Macedonia	5.7	6.0	5.4
Czechia	6.9	7.4	7.4	Norway	7.9	8.0	7.7
Denmark	8.0	7.8	7.6	Poland	7.3	7.8	7.7
Estonia	6.5	7.0	7.2	Portugal	6.2	6.7	7.0
Finland	8.0	8.1	7.9	Romania	7.1	7.3	7.7
France	7.1	7.3	7.0	Serbia	4.9	5.6	6.1
Germany	7.3	7.4	6.5	Slovakia	7.0	7.1	7.0
Greece	6.2	6.4	6.7	Slovenia	7.0	7.3	7.6
Hungary	6.1	6.5	6.9	Spain	6.9	7.3	7.1
Iceland	7.9	7.9	NA	Sweden	7.9	7.8	7.5
Ireland	7.4	8.1	7.4	Switzerland	8.0	8.0	8.0
Italy	6.7	7.1	7.2	Türkiye	5.7	5.7	5.4
Kosovo	NA	6.0	NA	United Kingdom*	7.3	7.6	NA
Latvia	6.5	6.7	6.8	EU27 (after 2020)	7.0	7.3	7.1

Source of data: Eurostat microdata and Hungarian microcensus

Although the relationship between the factors of material goods and subjective well-being is not necessarily linear, there is an obvious correlation in the European context between overall life satisfaction and economic situation, at least on the macro level (Blasco and Glezies, 2019).

Part Two – Main concepts and methodology

4. Linking subjective well-being and migration: a theoretical framework

The motivation behind migration has been extensively explored. A multitude of theories, conceptual frameworks, and empirical approaches have been developed to explain the initiation and the perpetuation of migration. With the increasing complexity of international migration processes, migration research has also begun to take a greater interest in how diverse migration situations influence individual well-being. This chapter presents the theoretical framework of well-being and migration relevant to the project, and the main concepts that are used.⁷

4.1. Conceptual framework of well-being

The term ‘well-being’ has been used loosely and abstractly for centuries (Milner-Gulland et al., 2014). The roots of the concept date back to Aristotle and were later revived, particularly by Bentham (Aristotle, 2009; Bentham, 2013). During the last decades of the 20th century, there was a significant increase in interest in well-being research (see Easterlin, 1974; Diener, 1984; Kahneman, 1999). This topic attracted even more attention following the final report of the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, chaired by Amartya Sen, Joseph Stiglitz, and Jean-Paul Fitoussi (Stiglitz et al., 2009).

Attempts to quantify well-being initially relied on easily measurable, objective components that reflected people’s life circumstances at the national level (e.g., Bauer, 1966). The indicators of development or welfare

7 The chapter is based on the following article, where the theoretical frame of the MIGWELL project and critical reflections on the presented theories are presented in more detail: Németh, Á., Göncz, B., Kohlbacher, J., Lengyel, Gy., Melegh, A., Németh, Zs., Reeger, U. and Tóth, L. (2023), Theoretical framework for the study of the two-way relationship between migration and subjective well-being. *Demográfia*, 66(5), English Edition, 19–69. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21543/DEE.2023.2>

have evolved from a narrow focus on objective measures to more complex, multidimensional indicators over the last few decades. The individual- or micro-level measurement of well-being has followed similar tendencies to the macro- or country-level indicators. Besides the relatively easily measurable objective components of well-being, its subjective factors have also attracted increasing research attention over the past few decades (Diener, 1984, 1994; Kahneman and Krueger, 2006; Easterlin et al., 2010, etc., as reviewed by King et al., 2016). *Subjective well-being* (SWB) generally captures people's thoughts and feelings about the quality of their life circumstances. It is usually measured through psychological responses, such as life satisfaction, autonomy, social connectedness, or personal security (Ryff and Keyes, 1995; Diener, 2012).

The evolution of the concept has entailed numerous interpretations since the 1970s, when the first attempts were made to associate happiness and satisfaction with welfare (Easterlin, 1974; Scitovsky, 1976). Since then, approaches and methods aimed at understanding what people believe they need to achieve a good quality of life, and measuring their degree of satisfaction with the extent to which these needs are met, have become more sophisticated (Veenhoven, 2008; McGregor et al., 2009; King et al., 2016, etc.).

The *hedonic* interpretation of subjective well-being relies on the utilitarian concept of pleasure and is frequently operationalised as life satisfaction and affect. The *life satisfaction* interpretation is both cognitive and evaluative, requiring individuals to make evaluative statements about different areas of life and about life as a whole (Boyce et al., 2010; Christoph, 2010; Dumludag, 2014, etc.). Satisfaction is usually understood as a lasting state of well-being. *Happiness* is closer to the terms 'affect' or 'affective well-being' that are used in psychology literature (Layard, 2005; Graham, 2009; Di Fabio and Palazzeschi, 2015, etc.). Positive and negative emotions – the components of *affective* well-being – reflect a more corporeal and transitory state of well-being. These are typically surveyed with reference to a shorter timeframe (for instance, the most recent four weeks). Nevertheless, it is important to note that satisfaction and emotions may be theoretically distinct but interrelated in practice, as people's emotional experiences influence their evaluations of life satisfaction (Dragolov et al., 2018). As Kahneman (1999) summarised: using a hedonic approach, subjective well-being can be seen as an index of psychological wellness, while happiness refers to the accumulation of moments of experiencing pleasure and the absence of pain (Diener et al., 1999; Selezneva, 2016).

Eudaimonic well-being is conceptualised within the tradition of humanistic psychology. Unlike emotions or satisfaction, this component of SWB does not correspond to a single internal state; rather, it utilises individuals' self-reports on a broader suite of elements considered necessary for people to flourish and fulfil their potential. Eudaimonic well-being reflects a sense of meaning and purpose in life, accomplishment, belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualisation (Clark et al., 2008; Di Fabio and Palazzeschi, 2015; Vittersø, 2016).

According to the OECD definition (OECD, 2013), subjective well-being encompasses the mentioned three elements: life satisfaction (a reflective assessment of a person's life or a specific aspect thereof), affect (feelings or emotional states, typically measured with reference to a particular point in time) and eudaimonia (a sense of meaning and purpose in life, or good psychological functioning).

Designed with broadly similar foundations, the WeD framework takes account of the dynamic interplay among three main well-being dimensions (Gough and McGregor, 2007).⁸ In the WeD framework, *material* well-being encompasses the objective circumstances of life, including resources such as income or employment. However, since people's goals and actions are always shaped by the social contexts in which they are embedded, well-being has a *relational* dimension as well. This dimension refers to the social relationships that people must be able to enter into in order to satisfy human needs and encapsulates essential, though less tangible, aspects of well-being, such as love, friendships, family ties, relationships with the community and the wider society, and the construction of identity, which is a situational and relational process (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). The third – *subjective* – dimension takes account of 'what it is that people themselves regard as important for their quality of life and their assessment of their level of subjective satisfaction in their achievement' (McGregor and Pouw, 2017: 1135).

With the addition of the relational dimension, the WeD approach places special emphasis on locally relevant social aspects and social embeddedness, making it especially well-adapted to understanding migration decisions and post-move SWB evaluations.

8 The concept was developed by the ESRC 'Well-being in Developing Countries' research group at the University of Bath.

4.2. Migration theories relevant to the project

Migration is driven by various complex factors that have been extensively explored. However, there is no general theory that explains the initiation and perpetuation of migration. Instead, as research on migration is intrinsically interdisciplinary and because each discipline considers different aspects of population mobility, a multitude of theories, explanatory models, and empirical approaches have emerged (e.g. Bretell and Hollifield, 2014; Arango, 2000). These concepts help us understand why some people migrate from a certain country or region, while others do not. Furthermore, they explain the individual and external factors that affect such decisions to move or stay, as well as the circumstances under which migration may be associated with benefits – or costs – for the migrants and their places of origin and destination.

Thus, the causal processes relevant to international migration might operate on multiple levels simultaneously. It is entirely possible that individuals engage in cost-benefit calculations to maximise income, households act to minimise risks, and the socioeconomic context within which these decisions are made is determined by structural forces operating at national and international levels (Papademetriou and Martin, 1991). As Castles et al. (2014) have stressed, a full understanding of migration requires contributions from a range of perspectives.

Models focusing on *push* and *pull factors* (e.g., Lee, 1966), either at the micro or at the macro-level, describe unfavourable external conditions (e.g., low wages or high unemployment) as factors motivating people to leave a place ('push' factors), while the target location is determined by favourable economic conditions ('pull' factors). The decision to migrate is also influenced by 'intervening obstacles' (such as distance, physical barriers, immigration laws, etc.) and personal factors. The migration process is selective because people's ability to overcome intervening obstacles depends on their personal characteristics, e.g., age, gender, social class, and educational level.

The macro- and micro-level variations of neoclassical models are not fully independent of the push-and-pull model, but they offer different ways to break down the complex subject of migration into analytically meaningful units. They are also related in that they pay little attention to the issue of well-being beyond income factors.

According to the *neoclassical macro model*, the direction and volume of migration are principally determined by wage inequalities and labour market imbalances (e.g., Harris and Todaro, 1970; Todaro, 1976; Zimmer-

mann, 1994). The assumption is that migration results from the uneven geographical distribution of labour and capital, and that wage differences drive people from low-wage countries to high-wage countries. The *neoclassical micro model* is based on a similar conceptual pillar (assuming that differences in earnings and employment are responsible for international migration), but it focuses on the individual choices that may be of interest for linking well-being and migration (Sjaastad, 1962; Todaro, 1969, 1976; Todaro and Maruszko, 1987). According to this approach, people are rational actors who move if a cost-benefit calculation leads them to expect a positive net return from doing so.

The decision-making process is often interpreted within the *human capital* framework (Sjaastad, 1962; Poot et al., 2009), which can also explain the selectivity of migration. Given the diversity of individuals in terms of age, gender, education, experience, language skills, etc., there are also differences in the extent to which they might gain from migrating: i.e., ‘they can expect diverging returns on their migration investment’ (De Haas, 2008: 6). This implies that the probability of migration differs between individuals and social groups, depending on their human capital characteristics.

The *life course approach* is another prism through which micro-level decision-making is often viewed, and which can be linked to well-being perspectives (Fassmann et al., 2018). Although each individual life follows its own course, similar patterns can be observed in the timing of events influenced by societal and biological factors (Wingens et al., 2011). Special attention has been paid to gender-specific differences, given that women’s life-course patterns may differ significantly due to factors such as childbirth and childcare (cf., e.g. Katz and Monk, 1993; Krüger and Baldus, 1999). Three main life-course transitions have been identified as potential triggers for migration: the transition from school or higher education to work, from unemployment to employment, and from living at home to living independently. The establishment of one’s own home is often connected with partnership formation or having children (King et al., 2016). According to the age-specific migration model of Bernard et al. (2014), the probability of migration is particularly high between the ages of 20 and 35.

In the past few decades, the Harris–Todaro model has been refined by several scholars (e.g. Borjas, 1990; Bauer and Zimmermann, 1998), who have included additional factors that influence the relationship. For instance, expected incomes depend not only on earnings at the destination but also on the probability of obtaining an appropriate job. Similarly, expected costs include not only financial but also immaterial costs (e.g., psychological ones), which can be linked to well-being.

In contrast to neoclassical models, the *new economics and sociology of labour migration* (NELM) underlines that migration decisions are usually made by *families and households*, rather than by isolated individuals. This perspective raises important questions concerning well-being (Stark and Bloom, 1985; Stark, 1991; Taylor, 1999; Szelényi, 2016). The theory is situated at the intersection of the micro and meso levels and places greater emphasis on people's efforts to not only maximise their own gains but also to minimise risks to family income and overcome capital constraints on family production activities (Stark and Levhari, 1982; Stark, 1984). In order to do this, households, particularly in developing countries, are interested in overcoming labour-market failures and diversifying their resources.

Although the concept of well-being has long been absent from migration theories, the new economics and sociology of migration (NELM) have already highlighted the importance of perceived deprivation and some other subjective aspects of migration-related decision-making. According to NELM, migration might be an option for households seeking to achieve a sustainable livelihood, thereby avoiding the deterioration of household poverty and improving capabilities and resilience. The push-and-pull concept is widely considered outdated, though the factors it describes may still be useful. These notions might offer a meaningful and easy-to-understand way for people to evaluate and interpret their individual migration decisions in the context of subjective well-being. Since migrant networks can play a significant role in decision-making and post-move changes in subjective well-being, people's connections with the expatriate community are also surveyed. This endeavour requires considering network theory as a meso-level approach.

Besides the neoclassical macro approach, more recent models also emphasise the *macro-structural factors* in migration. These concepts tend to pay much less attention to micro-level decision processes and focus on forces operating at higher levels of aggregation. For instance, dual labour-market theory links immigration with the structural requirements of modern industrial economies, while world-systems theory sees immigration as a natural consequence of economic globalisation and market penetration across national boundaries.

In migration studies, the term 'dual' (or 'segmented') labour-market theory refers to the dualistic economies of developed countries, which are structured to require a certain level of immigration (Piore, 1979). In these economies, there is a primary sector providing secure, well-paid, and comfortable work, and a secondary sector offering low- or unskilled jobs with relatively poor working conditions. While native inhabitants

take up more attractive jobs, secondary jobs are frequently occupied by immigrants. In addition to the ageing of the native population, structural inflation also drives the growing demand for an external labour force. The theory suggests that the main driver of international immigration is, in fact, the recruitment of a foreign labour force by developed economies to fill jobs in the secondary labour market. The functioning of the overall economy (Jennissen, 2004) and, in a wider context, the maintenance or even increase in the level of well-being depend on this pull factor, whereas the dual labour-market theory largely ignores push factors in migration systems.

World-systems theory (Sassen, 1988, 1991) argues that international migration is a by-product of global capitalism, produced by direct foreign investment in developing countries and the disruption it entails. On a global scale, most international migrants move from the periphery (poor countries) to the core (rich countries). This is due to factors associated with industrial development, which have generated structural economic problems (push factors) in the Third World. Since world-system theory focuses on structures rather than predicting behaviour, it is not directly related to well-being issues, particularly their subjective components.

Migration cycles provide a key macro-level concept for placing the Hungary–Austria migration nexus in a wider context. Although European countries do not necessarily pass through these phases in this exact order or at the same pace, and although the model of migration cycles does not explicitly reflect liquid forms of migration, the concept helps us to grasp the dynamics of international migration transitions in Europe.⁹ Dual labour market theory might also be relevant. People's labour-market positioning before and after migration, and their relationship with their income and subjective well-being, are important aspects of this project. Finally, the aspirations-capabilities approach is also important in assessing non-migration, emigration, and return migration.

In the *migration transition* model, Zelinsky (1971) described how *migration patterns change* over time in response to changes in economic and political systems. This concept extends the 'classic' demographic transition model. In a late transitional society, population growth slows consi-

9 Austria, for instance, is a typical immigration country where the socio-demographic challenges of the welfare state, such as population ageing, lead to increased pressure on the healthcare and elderly care system (Katona and Melegh, 2020), increasing demand for immigrant workers. Hungary is in a transition phase in which both directions of migration flow are equally important, although its migration balance is negative compared to Austria and other Western countries.

derably as fertility rates decline, while spatial mobility intensifies. New forms of spatial migration appear, such as circular migration patterns, commuting, retirement migration, etc. (Fassmann, 2011: 80). The concept of subjective well-being may be incorporated into this theory by positing that the idea of mobility becomes a 'normal' expectation related to increases in individual social and economic well-being.

In addition to macro-structural impacts and micro-level circumstances, meso-level factors may also affect migration processes. *Social networks* play an essential role in stimulating migration by reducing the risks of migration, e.g., by providing information about opportunities to work or study in a foreign country. This approach focuses on explaining the 'perpetuation' rather than the 'initiation' of international migration (Massey et al., 1993). These networks can be interpreted as 'sets of interpersonal ties that link migrants, former migrants, and non-migrants in origin and destination areas through the bonds of kinship, friendship, and shared community origin' (Massey, 1988). The network itself *emerges as an actor* in the migration process because it influences migrants' decisions regarding their migration destinations.

The concept of networks assumes a *risk-diversification model* and addresses the cumulative causes of migration, resulting in reduced social, economic, and emotional costs, all of which are important for well-being. These provide support to both potential and newly arrived migrants. Such support could take the form of financial help, practical information to facilitate the migration process, job opportunities, etc. (Massey et al., 1993). According to this model, families allocate labour among their members within the constraints of their own needs and aspirations in a cost-efficient and risk-minimising way. Given this choice, the reduced cost of migration increases the number of people who can and will leave, thereby increasing migration volume (Van Meeteren and Pereira, 2013). The concept of well-being is not an integral part of network theory.

According to the aspirations–capabilities framework, migration should be seen as people's capability to choose where to live – including the option to stay – rather than as the act of moving itself. Therefore, moving and staying are in fact complementary manifestations of migratory agency. As De Haas (2021: 30–32) argues, focusing research on people's migratory aspirations and capabilities would help us better understand how processes of social transformation and development shape international migration patterns. In this meta-theoretical framework, the interconnection between migration and well-being is stronger than in any other migration theory to date. Based on his empirical observations in Morocco, De Haas

(2021) points out that although local living conditions may improve significantly, people's overall aspirations may increase even faster. Strengthening aspirations – and, in parallel, growing capabilities – to migrate seem to be responsible for an increase in the number of emigrants 'despite, or paradoxically rather because of, significant improvements in local living standards'.

4.3. The subjective well-being – migration nexus

Since very few international surveys are explicitly designed to measure migrants' well-being outcomes, little is still known about the consequences of *migration for subjective well-being*, particularly about the effects of *SWB on migration intentions and/or decisions*. Empirical results suggest that migrants generally experience lower levels of life satisfaction than natives (Baltatescu, 2007; Bobowik, 2011; OECD, 2017). Furthermore, second-generation immigrants seem to be unhappier than their first-generation counterparts (Safi, 2010; Senik, 2011), and emigrants are usually less satisfied with their lives than stayers (Knight and Gunatilaka, 2010; Bartram, 2011). These conclusions and explanations, however, are far from consistent, and other studies have found opposing results (e.g. Lengyel, 2012; Erlinghagen, 2012; Ivlevs, 2015).

The divergence of findings is not only attributable to the obviously different historical and geographic contexts but also to the lack of a standardised, coherent theoretical framework. These investigations have predominantly used cross-sectional data to compare immigrants and natives in host countries (Baltatescu, 2007; Bartram, 2010; Safi, 2010; Göncz et al., 2012) or emigrants from and stayers in the sending countries (Erlinghagen, 2012; Bartram, 2013). Although both approaches provide useful information, neither can adequately demonstrate a causal impact per se. On the one hand, simply comparing emigrants with similar people who have remained in their country of origin can be misleading, since well-being gains may reflect unobserved differences in ability, risk tolerance, or motivation (McKenzie et al., 2010). On the other hand, neglecting pre-migration experiences may obscure reverse causality, i.e., it does not eliminate selectivity biases, whereby dissatisfied people may be more likely to migrate (Stillman et al., 2015). In the absence of longitudinal data, there are two alternatives¹⁰: creating a two-period synthetic panel using statistical matching (e.g. Nikolova and

10 For a unique exception, see Stillman et al., 2015.

Graham, 2015) or asking respondents to estimate their general life satisfaction retrospectively, before and after migration (e.g. Amit and Riss, 2014).

In spite of these methodological concerns and somewhat divergent conclusions, a growing number of academic papers have demonstrated that the separation of material and immaterial determinants and their subjective perceptions does make sense because these factors can influence migration decisions and post-move evaluations in different ways (e.g. Graham and Markowitz, 2011). Two *directions of shifts in SWB* can be identified in the literature: increased and decreased post-move life satisfaction (De Jong et al., 2002). Even though migrants' absolute incomes may rise, their initial expectations may fail to be fulfilled, and their SWB may decline. The reasons for this phenomenon can include physical distance from their safe social and family networks, linguistic and cultural distance from the host society, or the unexpectedly emerging frustration that stems from finding oneself in a lower position than members of the native population (Bartram, 2010: 2; Stillman et al., 2015: 86).¹¹

Set-point theory claims that individuals have their own set points of SWB, which they revert to once the psychological impact of major life events has dissipated. However, substantial and permanent *upward or downward changes* in life satisfaction are also observable in the context of migration (Headey, 2008). As Nowok et al. (2011) have claimed, migrants often experience frustration and dissatisfaction before their departure, whereas they feel happiness and have strong expectations during the migration process, but experience reduced SWB in the post-move phase. This also means that people's own past income and the reference group's living standard are important elements of SWB-related comparisons, as well as their expectations for the future.

The dynamics of these changes create *temporal fluidity in well-being*, presenting a remarkable methodological challenge for empirical studies (McGregor, 2007). As Headey et al. (2008: 68) have pointed out, people tend to 'change their preferences in response to what others have and want'. Since aspirations and social relationships are in constant flux, what really matters in the assessment of one's quality of life may also change as a consequence of adaptation to new external circumstances (Nussbaum, 2001; Quizilbash, 2006). In the context of migration, this process entails changes in reference groups too – e.g., new neighbours, new colleagues, and a

11 Cultural and linguistic differences create barriers, implying 'costs that potential migrants likely consider in deciding whether to migrate and where to go' (Adserà, 2015). However, the existence of large immigrant communities may encourage further moves and decrease migration costs (Pedersen et al., 2008).

new host society, often with higher average living standards. Thus, when immigrants change their reference group, the comparisons they make may become less favourable, resulting in a deterioration of their subjective well-being, despite an improvement in their objective situation.

The nexus between subjective well-being and the concepts of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 1995; Tzanakis, 2013; Klein, 2013, etc.) has also been attracting increasing attention in the literature. Nevertheless, while studies have found positive links between social connectedness and life satisfaction in general (e.g. Anheier et al., 2004; Bjørnskov, 2003; Dragolov et al., 2016), relatively few studies have considered the impact of social networks on SWB within immigrant communities (e.g. Xu and Palmer, 2011; Tegegne and Glanville, 2018). Familial relations definitely belong among the key factors that potentially shape migrants' subjective well-being and their decisions to move or stay. Melegh (1999) pointed out that the life history perspective on migration is often influenced by whether family relationships break down during migration or strengthen. Preliminary qualitative studies have also revealed that not only is the way that migrants narrate their life history shaped by gender-specific differences, but their perceptions of subjective well-being are also often 'gendered'. Central European migrants tend to frame their migration in terms of well-being, and the narrative of familial well-being is particularly common among female respondents (Kovács and Melegh, 2001; Melegh and Kovács, 2008).

The success of *integration* might also be an important factor in migrants' SWB changes. In general, integration refers to the process by which migrants become accepted into society, both as individuals and as groups. This is a two-way process of adaptation – and, in another sense, a form of acculturation – that requires efforts from both migrants and the host society. Ultimately, it is useless for a person to be ready to integrate if the host environment does not support them in this process. The changes that immigrants undergo involve at least six areas: language, cognitive styles, personality, identity, attitudes, and acculturative stress. The cause of problematic outcomes often stems from the different acculturation expectations of the host society and the acculturation orientation adopted by the immigrants (Bourish et al., 1997; Van Oudenhoven et al., 1998). Investigating the social connections between migrants and members of the host population (and the subjective perceptions of these relationships) is essential for a better understanding of the SWB–migration nexus.

In the aspirations-capabilities framework, migration and subjective well-being are connected on two levels. Firstly, De Haas' concept is heavily

inspired by Amartya Sen's (1985, 1994) capabilities approach to human well-being. De Haas emphasised that people may derive well-being from the potential for mobility freedom, irrespective of whether they take advantage of it (De Haas, 2021: 18). Regarding migratory aspirations, the other main pillar of the concept, De Haas expanded the notion of migratory agency into the subjective realm. Migration aspirations reflect people's general life preferences and their subjective perceptions of the quality of life in their current place of residence, as well as of opportunities elsewhere.

5. Research approach and methodology

5.1. Research approach

The relationship between migration and subjective well-being has only recently begun to receive attention, and this new literature still suffers from some pitfalls. For instance, studies predominantly focus on the effects of migration on SWB, yet we know little about how SWB affects migration intentions and decisions. These investigations primarily use cross-sectional data, focusing on the host countries and neglecting the dynamic aspect – i.e., immigrants' SWB prior to their migration. A significant proportion of the literature has yet to empirically test the accumulated hypotheses regarding the mechanisms of SWB changes in the context of migration. Furthermore, previous research mostly employs a rather narrow approach to overall life satisfaction and pays less attention to other measurement concepts.

The current project aims to address the aforementioned neglected issues. Its *innovative approach* is not simply the strong linkage of subjective well-being and migration, but rather the attempt to understand their two-way relationship within a single research framework and through a wide definition of well-being that grasps subjective well-being across its multiple dimensions and embeds the concept within the context of the respective objective measures.

The aim of this project is thus to answer the following research questions.

- *Austria–Hungary SWB gap*. Which objective indicators are responsible for the vertical and horizontal inequalities and the country-level differences in subjective well-being?

- *SWB* → *migration nexus*. How does subjective well-being influence intentions and/or decisions either to stay or to migrate among the Hungarian population?
- *Migration* → *SWB nexus*. How does migration affect the subjective well-being of Hungarians after moving to Austria? Does the perception of their well-being improve in line with their material gains, or fail to reach the expected level?

As already indicated, well-being in general, and subjective well-being specifically, has multiple dimensions, all of which require accurate measurement. Furthermore, subjective well-being cannot be sufficiently measured in isolation without considering the resources that people have and the relationships that influence their actions (McGregor, 2007). Therefore, subjective reflection on life satisfaction, affect, and eudaimonia will be our focal points, while additional sets of questions on the material and relational dimensions are expected to provide deeper insight into the dynamics of the migration–SWB nexus. Therefore, we applied a hybrid approach to conceiving well-being, drawing on both the OECD and the WeD concepts (Table 2).

Table 2. Subjective well-being domains and their operationalisation using objective and subjective indicators.

Measurement concepts	Subjective well-being indicators		Objective indicators
Evaluative well-being:	Domain satisfaction	Individual material factors	
		• Satisfaction with household financial situation • Satisfaction with personal income	Financial situation: • Personal income • Household income + debt • Material deprivation • At risk of poverty • Low work intensity
		• Job satisfaction	Economic status and jobs: • Economic status • Occupation (ISCO 08) • Highest level of education
		• Satisfaction with accommodation	Housing conditions: • Number of rooms • Housing problems: Leaking, Dark, Noise, Env. problem, Crime
Overall life satisfaction			
+			
Domain satisfaction			

Measurement concepts	Subjective well-being indicators		Objective indicators
Evaluative well-being: Overall life satisfaction + Domain satisfaction	Domain satisfaction	Individual non-material factors	
		• Satisfaction with health	Health status: • Perceived health status • Restriction due to health problems
		• Satisfaction with time use	Work-life balance: • Leisure activities • Total weekly hours of work
		• Satisfaction with commuting time	–
		Relational factors	
		• Satisfaction with personal relationships	Social connections (micro-level): • Marital status • Partnership • Household size • Number of children in HH • Discussion of personal matters • Help from others (material, non-material) • Meet friends
			Meso/macro-level social relationships: • Social exclusion • Looked down upon because of work, • Trust in others
		External factors	
		• Satisfaction with living environment	–
		• Feeling safe	–
Affective well-being		Being happy	–
		Being very nervous	
		Feeling down in the dumps	
		Feeling calm and peaceful	
		Feeling downhearted or depressed	
		Feeling lonely	
		Feeling stressed	

Measurement concepts	Subjective well-being indicators		Objective indicators
Eudaimonic well-being		Meaning of life	–
		Optimism	
		Ability to choose life path freely	

Source: Authors' construction

5.2. Methodology and data

Secondary data sources and methods in preparation for the surveys

The project applied a mixed-methods approach, including secondary data analyses and a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods: focus groups, interviews, and surveys in both countries. The empirical fieldwork consisted of successive steps of different types of data collection; each stage was designed with a clearly defined objective and sought to broaden the horizon of the research, always building on the experience of the previous stage.

At the early stages of the project, in order to define the context, a microdata set from the Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC),¹² a representative sample survey of private households in the European Union, was used. Indicators related to subjective well-being were collected in the 2013, 2018, and 2022 ad-hoc modules. Another important secondary source was the 2016 Hungarian microcensus, which includes a distinct subjective well-being module.

Complementing the mentioned secondary data sources, and in order to better understand the way in which potential migrants or stayers in Hungary and Hungarian immigrants in Austria construct their well-being, i.e., the areas of life to which they attach the greatest importance and the extent to which they are satisfied with the well-being outcomes they achieve, narrative interviews were carried out. These interviews

¹² EU-SILC is a representative sample survey of private households in the European Union collected at two different levels: the household and the individual level. Under its umbrella, Eurostat has been collecting and publishing comparable multidimensional microdata on income, poverty, social exclusion, housing, labour, education, and health from all Member States. EU-SILC also includes ad hoc modules covering specific topics, e.g., the intergenerational transmission of disadvantages, access to services, health, social and cultural participation, material deprivation, housing conditions, or personal well-being.

also helped to explore the motivations and intentions behind staying or moving to another country (including the option to return to Hungary) as well as pre- and post-migration experiences through the prism of subjective well-being.

The narrative interview technique is based on the idea that oral life stories have an identity-forming function. They aim to capture how people interpret, construct, and narrate their life events (Riessman, 1993; Rosenthal, 2004). This method is especially useful for analysing migration stories and related biographies: i.e., for understanding how migration creates narrative identity and the kinds of discourses that are employed (Kovács and Melegh, 2001).

Therefore, 20 narrative interviews with immigrants in Austria and potential emigrants/stayers or return migrants in Hungary were conducted (10 per group) to gather information on people's preferences and values. The typically two-hour-long narrative interviews followed the standardised guidelines.¹³

Besides narrative interviews, focus group discussions with stakeholders were also organised in Vienna and Budapest. Participants were community leaders and practitioners who have intensive daily contact with a relatively large number of people from our target populations, further enabling them to better understand some well-being and migration-related phenomena in Hungary and Austria. Engaging stakeholders helped bridge the gap between social theories, preliminary findings from statistical analyses, and real-world experiences, thereby greatly improving the quality of the questionnaire deployed for the surveys.

In a subsequent testing phase of the questionnaire development process, a verbal probing technique¹⁴ was applied through 20 (10 per group) cognitive interviews in Austria and Hungary. Cognitive interviews primarily focus on the questionnaire itself, trying to uncover the cognitive processes people use to answer questions (Willis, 1999).

13 The guidelines can be found at https://zenodo.org/communities/migwell_project

14 While narrative interviews focus on how things happened, *cognitive interviews* in the broad sense deal with the 'whys'; *the interpretation of events and words*. The cognitive interviewing method applied here was developed in the 1980s to identify response errors in survey questionnaires. Due to its several advantages, verbal probing has become a favoured technique among cognitive researchers (Willis, 1999). After the interviewer asks the survey question and the subject responds, the interviewer follows up, seeking additional details related to the question or the specific answer. For example: 'I noticed that you hesitated - what were you thinking?' or 'What does the term ... mean to you?' In essence, the interviewer 'probes' deeper to explore the reasoning behind the participant's response.

The cognitive interviews required a draft of the survey questionnaire, which we systematically went through with the respondents. The main aim of these interviews was to compile the best possible survey questionnaire by detecting and eliminating possible misunderstandings and minimising errors. It was a key step in testing the Hungarian and Austrian questionnaires for the respective surveys.¹⁵

These preliminary research phases were carried out in order to prepare the primary source of research data in this book, the MIGWELL surveys that were conducted between December 2023 and February 2024¹⁶. Particular attention was paid to the compatibility of the questionnaires with the EU-SILC and the Hungarian microcensus questionnaires, and the comparability of the surveys in Hungary and Austria.¹⁷

Surveys in Hungary

The survey, based on the probability sampling method, is representative of the Hungarian adult population. It mirrors the Hungarian population's characteristics by age, gender, education level, regional distribution, and settlement type.

Sample selection was done in two stages. In the first step, the settlement structure of the sample of 1,000 inhabitants was determined by region and settlement type based on the 2016 microcensus conducted by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office. The second stage of sampling involved the random selection of households at selected sampling points. This was done by means of a 'random walk' from a random starting point following a defined rule. Selection within a household was made using the 'last birthday' method (the household member aged 18 years and over whose last birthday was observed was invited to be interviewed. If this person was not at home on at least one occasion, the interviewer was required to visit the household at a different time on a different day and could only select another person if there was another failure or refusal to answer). The final sample comprises data from 1,003 individuals collected through face-to-face interviews. The rejection rate was 27%. After the survey, the start-

15 Although the analysis of these qualitative research phases is not included in the current book, insights gained from the narrative interviews, the focus groups and the cognitive interviews put the quantitative data into context and helped us to understand and explain certain social phenomena, further facilitating the development of the survey questions.

16 The surveys were carried out by two independent professional public poll institutes, Triconsult GmbH in Austria and Szociograf Kft. in Hungary.

17 The questionnaires can be found at https://zenodo.org/communities/migwell_project

ing points and the routes (87 routes in total) were checked, and telephone verification was also carried out.

To correct for potential distortions in the sample and to better reflect the population, a weighting procedure was applied. A stepwise process was used that assigns a weight to each sample member, calculated by taking into account the target group to which the individual belongs. In an iterative procedure, the weighting is based on the independent distributions of several variables; the process is repeated until the sample distribution of all variables that provide representativeness best fits the population distribution. The resulting range of weights is thus between 0.39 (female, aged 50-59, living in a municipality in Northern Hungary, with secondary education) and 2.44 (male, aged 30-39, living in a county seat in Northern Hungary, with primary education).

After the first round of the survey, it was decided that the relatively small number of potential emigrants would make it problematic to draw statistically valid conclusions (only 8% of respondents had concrete migration plans for the next two years). Therefore, a second round of the survey was organised, specifically focusing on people who wished to leave Hungary. Hereafter, this will be referred to as the 'boost sample'. The advantage of this supplementary sample is that it better reveals the socioeconomic characteristics of potential emigrants, given its larger sample size (an additional 375 respondents). Its disadvantage is that it is no longer representative of the adult Hungarian population, as it was conducted in municipalities where the representative survey indicated high emigration potential.

Although in the following the question used to measure migration intentions was (in accordance with the 2016 microcensus) a positive answer to the question '*Do you plan to move abroad in the next 2 years for work, study, or other reasons?*', in the case of the supplementary survey, a different, more permissive filter question was used. To be less restrictive and gain insight into a broader population with the inclination or general positive attitudes towards migration, respondents were selected for the sample if they had ever considered moving abroad and answered 'Yes' to the question '*Have you ever thought about moving abroad?*'.

Survey questions included objective factors of well-being (household and housing conditions, education, job, health condition, social relationships, indicators of work – life balance, income and wealth), and an assessment of the personal and national situation and perspectives, and elements of subjective well-being (life satisfaction, affective well-being, eudaimonic well-being), including trust, social problems and identity, social exclusion, previous migration experiences, migration intention and plans.

Survey in Austria

The fieldwork for the Austrian MIGWELL survey ran in parallel with the Hungarian one between December 2023 and February 2024.

The quantitative study of not easily approachable social groups demands a special approach. Time-and-space (centre/intercept) sampling and chain referral (e.g., snowball/respondent-driven) sampling methods are commonly used in migration studies and represent adequate solutions for exploratory research (Salganik and Heckathorn, 2004; McKenzie and Mistiaen, 2007; Göncz et al., 2012). Due to the lack of an exhaustive and accessible list that would have made it possible to identify Hungarian-born people in Austria, the quota-controlled snowball sampling method was chosen.

Although snowball sampling, in general, may overestimate the role of members who are more embedded in the community, a sufficiently large number of starting points and controlling the length of chains can ensure greater sample accuracy. Accordingly, special attention was paid to ensuring the use of a diverse set of starting points across gender, age, occupation, and geographical distribution. Eventually, the final sample of 310 respondents was achieved using more than 30 different starting points.

Another drawback of snowball sampling is that the final sample is not representative of the Hungarian population in Austria as a whole. This was not feasible due to both the relatively small sample size and the absence of crucial socio-demographic and socioeconomic data for the target population. However, the sample matched the gender and age structure of the Hungarian-born population in Austria, as available in the Statistics Austria database.

Two data collection methods were used during the fieldwork: Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) and Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI). About three-quarters of the respondents (N=226) participated in face-to-face interviews conducted by professional interviewers specially trained for this exercise, while 27% (N=84) filled in a pre-programmed online questionnaire via an individual link. After the survey, the starting points and chains were controlled for quality. Comparison of our primary data with the 2016 Hungarian microcensus for Hungarians in Austria showed that the only significant difference was that, in our survey, those with tertiary education were overrepresented.

Our target population, Hungarians living in Austria, was defined by country of birth (Hungary). In our sample, we selected persons aged 18 or older with a main or temporary address in Austria who had lived in the country for at least 1 year.

In the Austrian survey, we examined people's material resources, social relationships, and other objective factors related to well-being. Questions about their migration experiences and future migration intentions (including the option to return to Hungary) were also crucial for specifying sub-samples and for acquiring information on how long they plan to stay in Austria. The main focus lay in assessing their pre- and post-migration SWB patterns (in interaction with the material and relational dimensions of well-being), meaning that the interviewees were surveyed from an ex-post perspective.

Our method for gathering information on pre-migration well-being is based on respondents' retrospective perceptions and compares their values in 2024 with their well-being in the year/weeks before emigration. The advantage of this method is that it is time-saving, inexpensive, and simple to measure in questionnaire surveys, and does not require longitudinal follow-up. However, it has the disadvantage of potentially being biased. Sometimes, even motivated respondents' efforts do not allow for successful retrieval (Blair and Burton, 1987). In addition, the success of retrieval is also influenced by individual variables such as age and education (Berntsen & Rubin, 2002). However, the accuracy of retrieval in the case of migration is helped by the fact that the latter process can be considered a kind of anchor point (Shmotkin, 2005), which occurs at a particularly significant stage in the life course. According to Oberauer and colleagues (2006), people remember events more accurately when they are rare, have serious consequences, and are highly emotional. Migration is certainly such an event. Further distortion may be caused by fluctuations in subjective well-being prior to migration and the phenomenon that SWB typically declines in the year before emigration. Fredrickson (2000) and Kahneman and colleagues (1993) also point out that people tend to judge some past periods by their most intense moment of discomfort or by their end point. In such a case, the retrospective assessment of subjective well-being before migration would be lower than the true one, since the respondent would judge only the last, most negative period. In summary, retrospective SWB assessment can be subject to both positive and negative biases; therefore, the limitations of measurement error should be considered. However, retrospective evaluation, although often criticised in SWB studies, is a method frequently used in the absence of other data (e.g. Lundholm and Malmberg, 2006; Erlinghagen, 2021). Highlighting the importance of pre-migration experiences, Tosi and Impicciatore (2022) advocate the inclusion of retrospective questions in cross-sectional surveys. Although this method does not provide a fully accurate recollection of past experiences, it reflects them well (Tov, 2012).

Furthermore, the degree of happiness of an individual in the past and in the present is related. Bontan and Truglia (2011) were the first to describe this relationship, which they termed the ‘general habituation’ channel. According to the model, a greater sense of happiness in the past increases the likelihood of greater happiness in the present.

In addition to the potential biases posed by retrospective measurement, two other limitations should be noted that compromise the validity of the causal analysis regarding the total Hungarian population living in Austria. One is that only Hungarians in Austria who had lived there for at least 1 year were included in the survey. Since we restricted the sample to this group in the analysis, selection bias arises. Another potential bias is non-response bias due to the convenience sample. On the one hand, due to the snowball sampling method, we did not have the same chance of reaching each potential respondent. For example, those with no Hungarian acquaintances were almost certainly left out. Furthermore, many did not agree to participate in the survey because they were distrustful of the research. As we know, social relationships and trust are also related to life satisfaction, so censoring on this basis may lead to biased estimates.

5.3. Analytical groups and sample sizes

In the following, results will be presented for the main analytical groups to facilitate comparison. These groups are based on surveys: a representative sample of Hungarians, Hungarians who are not planning to move abroad, Hungarians planning to move abroad in the next two years, and Hungarians living in Austria. For Austria, to help contextualise, the EU-SILC 2022 micro-data is used, and, for reference, data (from the same dataset) on the native-born population and immigrants arriving from ‘new’ EU Member States.¹⁸

¹⁸ It is important to emphasise that the results of the Hungarian MIGWELL survey are representative of the total adult population in Hungary. However, an additional survey was needed to achieve an adequate sample size among potential migrants. Therefore, the subgroup of potential migrants is not representative. In Austria, the nationally aggregated data from EU-SILC 2022 are representative of the total adult population. For methodological reasons, statistical representativeness cannot be ensured after the breakdown by country of birth.

Accordingly, the comparative analysis briefly assesses the following relations:

1. Differences between potential stayers (2) and potential leavers (3) in Hungary
2. Differences among potential stayers (2) or potential leavers (3) compared to the Hungarian average (1)
3. Differences between Hungarians in Austria (7) and Hungarians in Hungary (1, 2, 3).
4. Differences between the Hungarian (7) and native-born populations in Austria (5), or immigrants from the new EU Member States (6).

Table 3. Description of analytical groups

	Label	Description	Source	Sample size
1	General HU 2024	Representative sample of Hungarian adult (18+) population	MIGWELL representative survey in Hungary 2023-2024	1,003
2	Pot. stayers Representative 2024	Those from Hungarian representative survey who do not intend to move abroad in the following 2 years	MIGWELL representative survey in Hungary 2023-2024	876
3	Pot. migrants Boost 2024	Those from Hungarian representative survey and supplementary sample who intend to move abroad in the following 2 years	MIGWELL representative and supplementary surveys in Hungary 2023-2024	233
4	General AT 2022	Representative sample of the Austrian adult (18+) population	EU-SILC 2022 microdata, Austria	10,191
5	Native in AT 2022	Native-born population	EU-SILC 2022 microdata, Austria	8,589
6	EU12 in AT 2022	Immigrants arriving from 'new' EU Member States	EU-SILC 2022 microdata, Austria	414
7	HU in AT 2024	Snowball sample of Hungarian population living in Austria for at least one year (18+, born in Hungary, having a main or temporary address in Austria)	MIGWELL survey in Austria 2023-2024	310

Part Three – Research results

Part Three summarises the key findings of the MIGWELL project based on the surveys carried out within the project. After a brief presentation of perceived motivations throughout the different stages of migration, the following two chapters examine the similarities and differences between the objective and subjective dimensions of well-being in the Hungary–Austria context. The primarily descriptive analysis already yields novel insights, as it is the first to provide an overview of the migration experiences and socioeconomic situation of Hungarians living in Austria through the lens of well-being. Moreover, by embedding our primary data into existing secondary datasets, we provide a broader context for interpreting subsequent results. The final chapters within this part explore the two-way relationship between migration and SWB. First, we identify the factors shaping emigration intentions in Hungary – with particular emphasis on life satisfaction and other subjective aspects – then we examine changes in the subjective well-being of Hungarians in Austria after migration. The last chapter within this part reflects on an empirical observation that the topic addressed by the MIGWELL project can also be examined within the theoretical framework of migrant transnationalism, and that certain characteristics of transnational activities may be linked to subjective well-being. Finally, we briefly address the issue of return migration.

6. Migration as a multi-stage process

Migration can be understood as an outcome of a decision-making process, grasped through its gradual nature, from the formulation of the intention to the concrete steps leading to its realisation. Migration intentions represent the early phases of this process, during which plans may change, and only some intentions will be realised. Analysing the early phases of this process allows us to grasp the main dimensions of selection: the socio-demographic characteristics of this population and their differences in objective and subjective well-being, which appear to be important drivers of both intentions and migration itself (Gödri-Feleky, 2017).

Studies linking migration intentions to the actual act of migration, and examining the extent to which prior intentions are realised, are scarce, and diverge in their estimation of the degree to which migration intent-

ions can be considered a good indicator of the actual act of migration. Nevertheless, if migration is conceived as a selection process, intentions and the actual act can be considered distinct phases of the overall process (Gödri and Feleky, 2013). There are few longitudinal studies that can measure whether and to what extent intentions translate into actual behaviour. According to a study conducted in the Netherlands between 2005 and 2007/2010, 24% of expressed intentions had become actual migration by 2007, and 34% by 2010 (Van Dalen and Henkens, 2013), and migration intention was the main predictor of actual migration. A similar study in Hungary found that 20% of men and 12% of women had converted their migration intentions in 2003 into actual migration by 2007 (Hárs, 2008). Another study found that 17% of migration plans were fulfilled over a 3-year follow-up period (Gödri and Feleky, 2017) and that previous migration plans were a statistically significant predictor of actual migration.

6.1. Migration plans in Hungary

Migration potential refers to the share of the population intending to migrate: it is an indicator of the proportion planning to leave their country for a short or long period (Sik, 2003). It does not account for the actual act of migration but refers to plans; it cannot be used as a direct estimator of migration.

As such, the extent of migration potential is largely dependent on the way it is measured: whether plans, intentions, or actual actions are considered. Migration potential in Hungary has been measured since the early 1990s by TÁRKI using questions about plans to go abroad to work for a few weeks, a few months/years, or indefinitely. These results show that the migration potential of the Hungarian population, in terms of short- and long-term employment, increased during the 2000s compared with the 1990s, then peaked in 2012 (when 19% reported any kind of intention), and declined to 13% by 2016. Regarding who would like to migrate, results from previous research indicate that intentions are stronger among younger individuals with greater material and social resources, as well as those who are also less satisfied, more pessimistic, and more likely to feel discriminated against (Sik and Simonovits, 2002; Sik and Örkény, 2003).

In our project, we measured migration intentions in a somewhat different way, aiming for comparability with the results of the 2016 Hungarian microcensus. The latter measured migration potential through the question: “Do you plan to move abroad in the next 2 years for work, study or

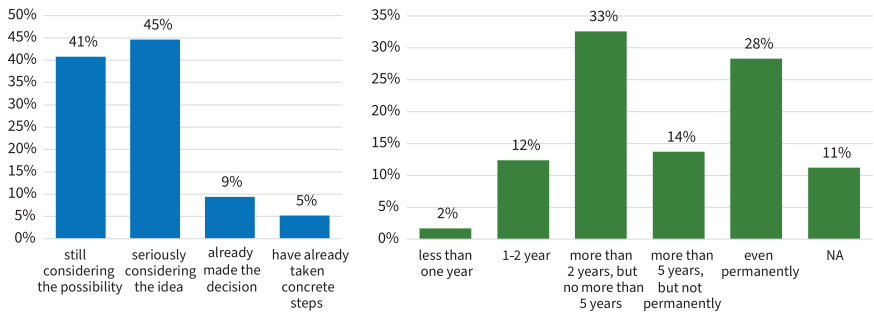
other reasons?” to which respondents could answer “no” (86.5%), “I don’t know” (5.7%) or “yes” (6.3%). To add nuance and better grasp the graduality of intentions to move, we asked additional questions about whether respondents had ever thought about moving or whether they would like to live abroad. The migration potential in Hungary in 2016 was 6.3%, but if we narrow the population to those younger than 64 years of age (removing from the sample the older generations less likely to migrate), 8.4% of the population were planning to move abroad. This figure is closely aligned with the results of our representative survey in 2023 (8.3%). Migration intentions in a wider sense – i.e. migration inclinations or positive attitudes towards migration – affect 23-25% of the population.

To increase our sample size and enable the analysis of individuals with migration intentions, we used a boost sample to complement our representative sample. People recruited in this part of the survey had either “ever thought” about moving abroad or expressed a desire to move abroad. Sixty-two per cent of them plan to move within two years.

Regarding the sociodemographic characteristics of those who intend to migrate, previous studies have confirmed that migration potential is higher among more educated, younger men from urban areas (e.g. Sik, 2018). Our results indeed confirmed these findings – a detailed overview is presented in the forthcoming chapters.

In the following, the plans and details of the intended migration of those planning to migrate within the following two years will be presented. As already mentioned, intentions to move to another country are not always realised. Intentions can differ in terms of their seriousness and the kind of migration that is intended. Indeed, in our survey, 41% of those with migration intentions were still only considering the possibility, 45% were seriously considering the idea, 9% had already made a decision, and only 5% had already taken concrete steps to organise their move. These concrete steps primarily consisted of gathering information through contacts (59% of those who had taken concrete steps), the internet (40%), and an actual job search (32%). The planned duration of stay ranged from 2 to 5 years for one-third of those planning to migrate, whereas 28% would consider never returning.

Figure 6. Migration plans and planned length of stay among those with migration intentions



Source of data: MIGWELL surveys (those planning to migrate in the following two years – representative and boost sample combined). Authors' figure.

“Two years ago, I started working on that [planning], if we go to Canada, I realised I need a language exam, an additional language exam, international exams, then [there’s] the children[’s language skills], and [...] my husband’s French exam, and his French language skills, [...] get[ting] a visa in Canada, a residence visa, what it was all about [what would be required], I’ve been going through it, I’ve read it, I’ve memorized it. In fact, the steps are clear to me as to how to achieve this. Then we started to discuss this more seriously and talked to several members of the family who already live abroad – [...] aunts, cousins, because my husband’s aunts live abroad, their children, everyone. Everyone said, ‘Good, good, but don’t go across the ocean! Stay in Europe’, because it’s a terrible thing that relatives commute to America to be with the children, with the grandchildren, it’s different than going to Belgium because that’s where their other kid lives. That’s a huge difference.”

(45-49-year-old woman, marketing expert, potential migrant)

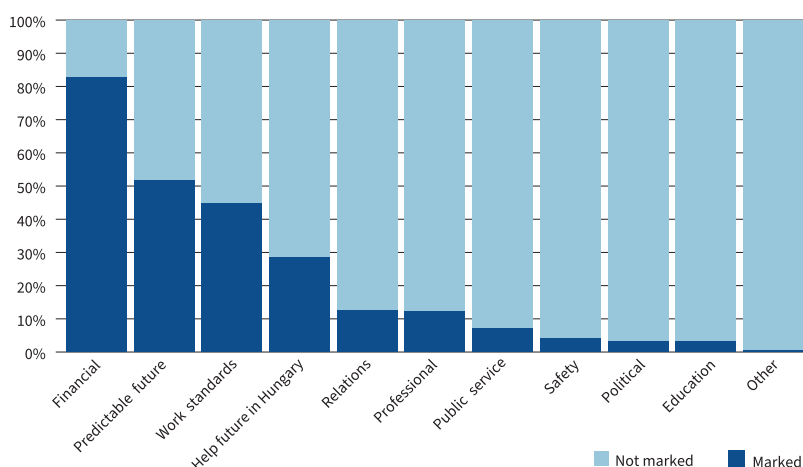
In line with previous studies, the main destinations of Hungarians are Austria and Germany: 43-43% of respondents mentioned these countries among the three they would consider moving to. The third main destination is the UK, mentioned by one quarter of those with migration aspirations. Approximately another 10% each would go to the Netherlands, the USA, or the Switzerland, in descending order of popularity.

As for the purpose of the intended migration, 99% would move to another country for work, 70% would accept work even in a field other than their original profession, and 56% would accept work below their level of qualification. Besides working (multiple answers were possible), 19% would like to learn a foreign language, and another 7% would like to study abroad, 25% at a graduate level and 31% to obtain a professional qualification.

Interestingly, only 27% speak the language of their first-choice country at a level sufficient for conversation; 43% have only basic language knowledge; and 29% do not speak the language at all. However, this lack of language skills does not seem to be a major deterrent of planning to migrate.

Persons intending to move to another country could indicate three reasons or objectives for their migration. The primary reason was financial, with 83% citing this. Other important reasons include the pursuit of a more predictable future abroad (reported by 52%) and improved working conditions (reported by 45%). Another 29% reported that migration was intended to help secure their financial future in Hungary (e.g., start a family, build a house, or start a business). Migrating to join family members, friends, etc., for professional reasons (to advance one's career or to gain professional experiences abroad), or to obtain access to better public services, was also mentioned by 7 to 13% of individuals, while reasons related to public safety or politics were also mentioned by a few.

Figure 7. Reasons to migrate among those with migration intentions



Source of data: MIGWELL surveys (those planning to migrate in the following two years – representative and boost sample combined). Authors' figure.

“And then the fact that I’m moving abroad depends on two things: if my daughter is admitted to a school here [in Hungary], then how do I manage the funding, and then I’m driven by purely financial considerations to get out. And if my family stays home and I’m making money abroad, we’re still talking about financial considerations, because then the money is remitted, and then I’m gonna have to spend the money I make out there. So my moving out is driven by financial reasons, because I can’t afford to have my children go to school with a Hungarian salary at home.

[...] and obviously, a lot has changed. I consider these changes primarily a change in the political environment. I feel really, really, really bad about this. So when we talk about going away, this is also a significant part of the reasons, and not because I don’t feel safe at the moment, but this kind of social arrangement [that is present in Hungary] doesn’t feel desirable. So I do not feel good in ... an illiberal democracy [...], where decisions can be made at any time, which are not made by an impartial court, but, say, through a phone call, a court decision is made, or, at any time, a telephone call can close the borders, perhaps order [...] mandatory military service for anyone based on a whim, so the decisions that affect my everyday life are not born in a way that I can tolerate, i.e., by democratic institutions or entities, but by one man’s constant fever that affects everything here. [...] Fortunately, we are still members of the Union. Fortunately, we’re still members of NATO. They’ll protect us from it at all. From having] fatal things happen, but if these two things don’t work out, [if NATO and the EU stop protecting us, I’m telling you to run.”

(50–54-year-old woman, economist, potential migrant)

“[What is your main motivation to go to work in Austria?] Actually, making a living. So the fact that I feel that they are making it impossible for me to live in Hungary without any problems. Actually, I don’t have any big extra demands, just that when I work, I get paid for it, and I don’t have to pay half of it, or whatever percentage, into the state budget for things that aren’t actually reinvested in the country. I feel that this money mainly goes into their pockets. So this sense of freedom [I would have] is that I’m working, and for that job, I’m getting the money that I think I’m gonna get, and they’re gonna leave me alone. So that I don’t have to play tricks to earn and keep my money, I don’t have to keep talking to accountants about how to use these loopholes, so I’ll have one or two thousand forints more left in my pocket, and it’s exhausting. So I’d like a simpler system.

Meanwhile, I see them destroying the country, completely ruining everything that makes life more comfortable, or something like that, I don't even know how to put it. [...] More peaceful, yes. More predictable, yes, so I don't have to worry about what they're going to change suddenly. And I can see that this is really where we're headed, or that we're moving in a direction where they want to dumb people down as much as possible, because they're easier to control. Obviously, it's easier to get votes that way, and then you have to live in a completely dumbed-down society, which leads to xenophobia, bigotry, and I see that this country is becoming more and more closed off. If not Budapest, then the more disadvantaged regions, the countryside. They [the populations of these areas] just chant what they hear on TV. And it's terribly depressing for me to see the direction we're heading in, with the constant destruction of healthcare and education."

(30–34-year-old man, electrician, potential migrant)

More than one-third of those planning to migrate (38%) would move alone, while half of them (53%) would migrate with their partner and 29% with a child. Regardless of whether respondents would move alone or with others, a great majority (93%) report having the support of their immediate environment, family, and friends, and about 43% report feeling strongly supported in any eventual decision to move, which is an important factor in successful migration.

6.2. Motivations for migration among Hungarians living in Austria

In our survey, the main reasons for migration were also asked of our migrant sample in Austria using a question similar to that used among those with migration intentions in Hungary; the results were very similar. The leading reason for migrating to Austria was related to material well-being, with 57.5% of respondents citing financial motives (Figure 8). The second most popular answer was for a more predictable future (39.4%), while the third was for better working conditions (37.4%). The three main reasons are similar to those given by Hungarians intending to migrate. Reasons also cited by more than 10% of the sample include education (25.2%), social relationships (19.4%), and to improve their future back in Hungary (planned return) (11.6%). Political reasons were mentioned by 8.1% of respondents.

“Before [migrating], I went through a divorce. Three children, 50% child support. Now, it’s easy to add up how much money is needed for a person to get by in a month in such a situation, and there was no other option... Financially, the whole thing didn’t work out. On top of that, I was the kind of person who said that if everyone moved away from Hungary, I would be the last one to lock the door, and even then, from the inside. So, I’m not [I wasn’t] going anywhere. But there just wasn’t any other option, there wasn’t any other path.”

(50–54-year-old man, waiter, Austria)

No statistically significant relationship at the $p < 0.1$ level is identifiable between the six most common reasons for migration and gender. The largest differences are observed for financial reasons (69.2% among men, 53.3% among women) and for better working conditions (42.1% among men, 32.9% among women). However, the individual’s current level of education is associated with financial reasons (χ^2 : 12.43, $p = 0.006$), reasons related to education (Fisher’s exact test, $p < 0.001$), and reasons connected to improving the respondent’s future back in Hungary (Fisher’s exact test, $p = 0.014$). Financial motives are most common among those with vocational qualifications (72.5%), but are also strong among those with only primary education (68.8%) (compared to 57.9% for secondary school graduates and 47% for university degree holders).

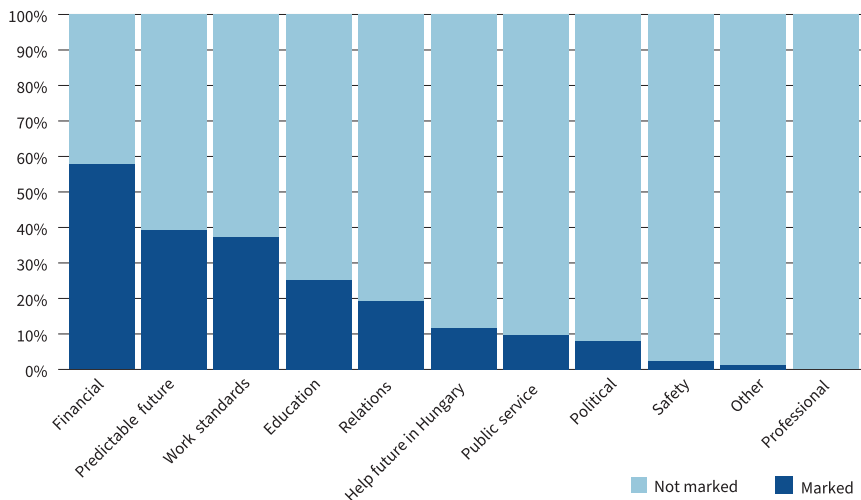
The same trend is characteristic of the motive of improving one’s future in Hungary at a later stage. This reason is most common among those with primary education (25%) and vocational qualifications (18.8%). With migration for education, however, the trend is reversed: higher values appear among secondary school graduates (35.5%) and university degree holders (28.2%).

“But honestly, it was the atmosphere at home [that was the reason I left]. I’m from Budapest, we are from Budapest, and this atmosphere leaves its mark on everything. It was too much. And yes, we felt our life at home was hopeless.”

(40–44-year-old man, food-service worker, Austria)

The presence of financial motives is also associated with age ($W = 9866$, $p = 0.017$), as is migration for better working conditions ($W = 12878$, $p = 0.03$) and reasons related to education ($W = 3873$, $p < 0.001$). When financial motives are present, the median age is 40, compared to 37 when they are absent. Intended emigration for better working conditions is likewise more typical among older respondents (median 39 years vs. 37 years when absent), whereas education-related reasons are characteristic of younger individuals (median 25 years vs. 42 years when absent). Citing education-related reasons ($W = 11494$, $p < 0.001$) is associated with the year of migration, as is emigration for relationship-related reasons ($W = 9337.5$, $p = 0.003$). When education-related motives are present, migration is more recent (median 2018 vs. 2014 when absent); in contrast, relationship-driven migration is more typical among Hungarians who moved abroad earlier (median 2010 vs. 2015 when absent).

Figure 8. Motivations for migration of Hungarians residing in Austria



Source of data: MIGWELL surveys. Authors' figure.

7. Objective factors underlying well-being

This chapter presents the general demographic and socioeconomic data for our target groups – Hungarians living in Hungary and Austria – based on the MIGWELL survey conducted in 2024. For Austria, we also show the national averages from the EU-SILC 2022 and, for reference, data on the native-born population and immigrants arriving from the ‘new’ EU countries. The aim of this chapter is to identify the most important objective factors that may impact subjective well-being. These objective factors will be compared across the different analytical groups (see Chapter 5.3).

The tables in the appendix ¹⁹ present the distribution of categories (in percentages) or the mean and median values (in the case of scalar variables) used in the descriptive analysis, along with the corresponding significance levels. Due to space limitations, only a selection of figures and tables is displayed in this chapter. The boxplots always show the median (black line) and the mean value (white dot), while the box itself represents the interquartile range (IQR), that is, the middle 50% of the data between the first and third quartiles.

It should be emphasised once again that the results of the Hungarian MIGWELL survey are representative of the total adult population of Hungary. However, for potential migrants, an additional survey was required to obtain a sufficiently large sample (referred to as the ‘boost sample’ in the tables). Consequently, the subgroup of potential migrants does not constitute a representative sample. In Austria, the nationally aggregated EU-SILC 2022 data are representative of the total adult population; however, for methodological reasons, statistical representativeness cannot be ensured once the data are broken down by country of birth.

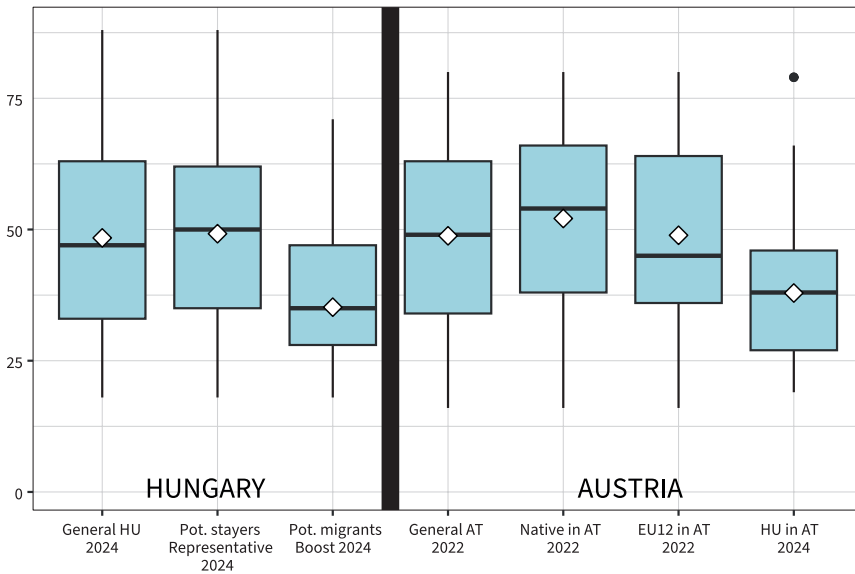
7.1. Demographic and spatial characteristics

In Hungary, the sex ratio among potential stayers mirrors the national average (47% men and 53% women). In contrast, the pattern is reversed for potential emigrants, among whom 53.2% are men – the largest proportion of men in any of the subgroups we analysed. According to the Statistics Austria, women comprise 54% of the Hungarian-born population stock. This female surplus is smaller than that observed among immigrants from the new EU Member States, yet larger than for both the Austrian population overall and the native-born population (each with a 51% proportion).

¹⁹ Additional tables and figures are uploaded to: <https://doi.org/10.14267/978-963-503-982-1>

Our survey results indicate that Hungarians living in Austria are generally younger than those in other EU-SILC 2022 subgroups. Respondents to the MIGWELL survey had an average age of 38, compared with the Austrian average of 49. Figure 9 shows only one subgroup whose members are on average even younger: those planning to emigrate from Hungary, with an average age of 35. This is significantly lower than both those intending to stay (49 years) and the national average (48 years). This pattern aligns with the well-documented tendency for international migrants to be younger adults, typically in their twenties or thirties (Fassmann et al., 2017; Tálas, 2020: 73).

Figure 9. Average age of individuals in Hungary and Austria by analytical subgroup



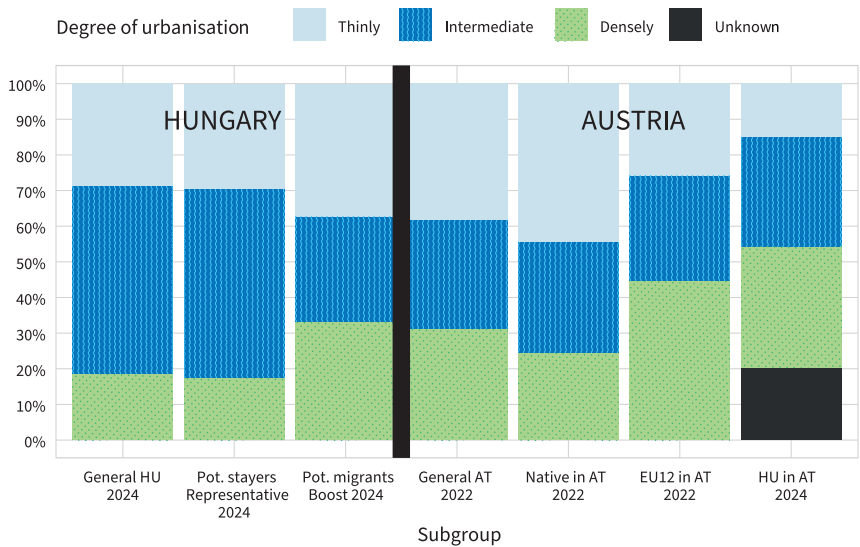
Source of data: EU-SILC 2022, MIGWELL surveys 2024. Authors' figure.

The MIGWELL survey in Hungary was representative of geographical distribution, too; however, spatial representativeness was not achieved for potential migrants after the additional data collection phase. In Hungary, the proportion of potential stayers in the survey is almost identical to the national proportion. Respondents living in Pest County and the Southern Greater Plain region are slightly over-represented among potential emigrants. In Austria, the EU-SILC data are representative of the total adult population in general, but statistical representativeness cannot be ensured at

the subnational level, particularly after the breakdown by country of birth. In comparison with the spatial distribution of the Hungarian population in Austria, the locations Vienna and Styria are slightly overrepresented in the MIGWELL sample, while other regions are slightly underrepresented. (However, the difference is typically smaller than one percentage point.)

In terms of the degree of urbanisation, there is a significant difference between potential migrants and those who intend to stay. Thirty-seven per cent of those who plan to leave Hungary would migrate from low-density settlements, and 33% from high-density settlements, i.e., typically from villages or large cities. These proportions are only around 30% and 17% for those intending to stay. A fifth of Hungarians in Austria did not provide a specific settlement name, so no data are available for this variable. However, it can still be concluded that they are basically urban dwellers, similar to immigrants from the new EU countries. While EU-SILC data show that 45% of the native-born Austrian population live in low-density settlements, only 19% of Hungarian respondents do (Figure 10). From the above, we can also conclude that a significant proportion of Hungarian migrants from rural areas have not only crossed an international border but also begun a new life in a big city. This change in lifestyle alone can affect subjective well-being.

Figure 10. Share of individuals by degree of urbanisation of their place of residence in Hungary and Austria by analytical subgroup



Source of data: EU-SILC 2022, MIGWELL surveys 2024. Authors' figure.

7.2. Financial situation

To outline the context, we need to highlight changes in the national averages of certain macro-level indicators.

Personal and household income

According to the 2013 EU-SILC survey, personal incomes in Austria were, on average, three times higher than in Hungary (ca. 27,300 EUR vs. 7,600 EUR). Regarding the median values, the difference was similar: ca. 22,000 EUR in Austria and 6,600 EUR in Hungary. This income gap had narrowed by the time of the 2018 and 2022 EU-SILC waves; the mean and median values then revealed ‘only’ a 2.3-fold difference between the two countries (ca. 27,600 and 22,800 EUR vs. 12,200 and 10,600 EUR) (Table 4). In terms of equivalised disposable household income, one observes similar trends: the average and median income levels show a 2.3- and 2.4-fold difference in favour of Austria, respectively.

Table 4. Average total personal income in Austria and Hungary (yearly, gross, EUR/per capita), considering all types of incomes and benefits, adjusted for PPP and inflation, standardised to 2022 local currency units using the corresponding official HICP indexes.

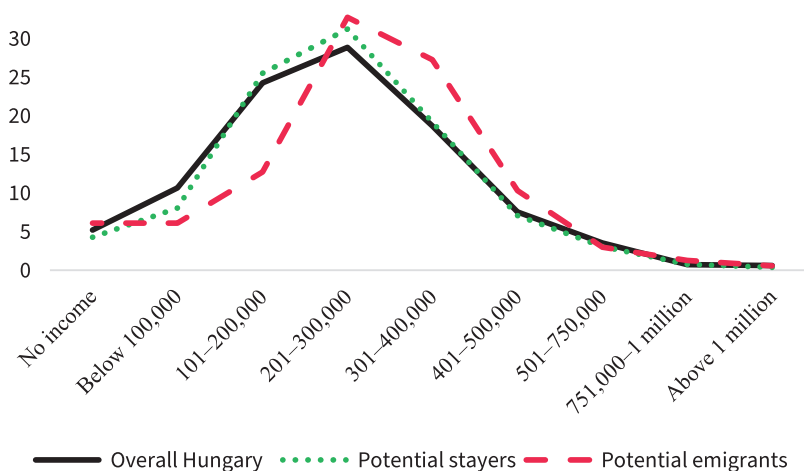
	Austria			Hungary		
	2013	2018	2022	2013	2018	2022
Mean	27,326	28,603	27,599	7,627	9,827	12,216
Median	22,070	23,671	22,780	6,600	8,520	10,644

Source of data: Eurostat microdata. Authors’ construction.

The income distributions of potential emigrants in Hungary are very similar to the national pattern. However, the sample of potential emigrants shows some interesting differences. If we exclude those who refused to answer, the share of individuals with a net income of HUF 200,000 or less is much smaller among potential emigrants (18.8%) than among those who want to stay (33.5%) and the Hungarian national average (34.9%). Medium income earners (201-500 thousand HUF) account for 70.3% of those planning to emigrate, compared to 58% for potential stayers and 55% for the national representative sample. At the same time, the share of high-income earners (above HUF 500,000) varies within a narrow range

(4.1%-4.8%). In summary, it is not the poorest nor the wealthiest who typically want to emigrate from Hungary, which is consistent with general 'migration hump' theory (Zelinsky, 1971).

Figure 11. Distribution by income level of those planning to emigrate* and those wanting to stay in Hungary (% , HUF). *Question: Do you plan to move abroad in the next two years for work, study or other reasons?



Source of data: MIGWELL survey. Authors' figure.

Among Hungarians in Austria, those with a monthly income of above 3,500 EUR are clearly under-represented. Excluding those who refused to answer, only 6.8% of respondents belong to this group. This share is closest to the 10.5% of immigrants from the new EU countries, and represents a remarkable gap compared to the native population (25.6%). At the same time, the low-income group, i.e. those with a monthly income of up to 1,600 EUR, is relatively small (26.1%, compared to the Austrian average of 31.6%). This is mainly due to the relatively low inactivity rate and high employment rate among Hungarians in Austria. (It is important to underline again that this indicator includes all types of income, including pensions, social benefits, etc.) The data above indicate that the middle-income group (1,600-3,500 EUR) is strongly over-represented among Hungarians in Austria, with a share of 59% compared to 37-39% for all other groups surveyed.

Relative deprivation

It is important to note that poverty data for Hungary after 2018, as listed below, should be interpreted with caution, as serious concerns have recently been raised regarding their validity (Tátrai et al., 2024).²⁰ Due to methodological shortcomings, the SILC data presented below may depict a more favourable situation than is actually the case.

The at-risk-of-poverty rate is a relative measure indicating the proportion of individuals whose equivalised disposable income (after social transfers) falls below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold, defined as 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers. This methodological approach explains why the proportion of individuals living below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold is similar in the two countries. In Austria, approximately 13% of the population falls into this category, compared to 12% in Hungary, and these rates have remained remarkably stable over time.

Low work intensity, which measures the proportion of individuals aged 0–59 living in households where adults worked less than 20% of their total potential working time in the previous year, remained relatively stable in Austria at around 5%. In Hungary, this indicator fell significantly from approximately 9% in 2013 to 4% in 2018, but rose slightly to 5% by 2022.

We also examined the proportion of individuals for whom debt repayment – excluding mortgage or main dwelling-related loans – constitutes a financial burden. In 2022, those without such debts represented around 79% of the population in Austria and 80% in Hungary. However, debt repayment challenges persist for about 3% of Austrians and 5% of Hungarians.

“When I first came out to Austria, it was because my mum had been raising the three of us on her own, and then the housing loan crisis hit. I thought I’d take a six-month break from university and go work as a waiter. That was really my motivation – I sent money home to Mum so she could pay off all those debts that had piled up, just to keep the house”.
(30–34-year-old woman, social worker, Austria)

²⁰ According to the official EU-SILC Release Notes, Hungarian microdata from 2019 to 2024 have been temporarily removed from the latest release of SILC UDB (uploaded on 11 July 2025, DOI: 10.2907/EUSILC2004-2024). After the methodological revision process, revised data have been updated in late 2025.

In 2013, the share of materially deprived individuals was relatively low in Austria, at just 4%, dropping further to 2% by 2022. In contrast, over a quarter of Hungary's population (26%) faced material deprivation in 2013. The subsequent decline to 9% highlights a significant improvement in living standards in Hungary. The concerns regarding data validity should be highlighted again (see footnote 21).

'*Severe material deprivation*' is a Eurostat indicator that refers to the proportion of the population that cannot afford at least four of nine predefined material items considered by most people to be desirable for having an adequate standard of living. The list includes the inability 'to pay unexpected expenses, afford a one-week annual holiday away from home, a meal involving meat, chicken or fish every second day, the adequate heating of a dwelling, durable goods like a washing machine, colour television, telephone or car, being confronted with payment arrears (mortgage or rent, utility bills, hire purchase instalments or other loan payments)'.²¹ In the MIGWELL survey, we asked the same standardised questions regarding household capabilities.

It is a remarkable contradiction that, although the financial situation of potential migrants is objectively somewhat better than that of potential stayers, they generally feel they can only cover their everyday expenses with minor or major difficulty. This was the response of 73.5% of potential migrants, a much higher figure than for both potential stayers and the national average (55%). For the other variables, there are no significant differences between the analysed subgroups in Hungary. In fact, some statistics paint a more favourable picture for potential emigrants: for example, a larger proportion can afford to buy quality food, and more can keep their homes sufficiently warm.

21 One of the components that defined the at-risk-of-poverty-or-social-exclusion rate (AROPE) according to the Europe 2020 strategy. Later, the number of predefined deprivation items increased from 9 to 13 in the Europe 2030 strategy. The new items are the following: the ability to replace worn-out furniture, replace worn-out clothes with new ones, have two pairs of properly fitting shoes (including a pair of all-weather shoes), and spend a small amount of money each week on him/herself. For the sake of data comparability, we refer to the older definition of material deprivation in this report. See more details: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Material_deprivation and https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Living_conditions_in_Europe_-_material_deprivation_and_economic_strain.

"I always felt that in Hungary we were living from one day to the next. We had our own flat and decent jobs, but there wasn't really any sense of a future. That feeling cast a shadow over our mood and our everyday life as well. We couldn't afford holidays, or if we did go, it was more like taking tins of liver pâté from home."

(40–44-year-old man, food-service worker, Austria)

Hungarians in Austria perceive their financial situation more positively across all aspects of the survey. The difference is remarkable for two variables in particular. Only 27% of respondents in Austria said they can only cover usual expenses with some or major difficulty. Almost 90% of the Hungarians in Austria can afford at least one week's holiday a year, compared to 50-52% of members of the Hungarian subgroups.

"Now, if I want to, I can go out for dinner. If I want a new coat, I buy a new coat. But happiness isn't about owning sixty-five coats – it's about being able to do these things smoothly, without stressing over them"

(50–54-year-old man, Austria)

As far as household possessions are concerned, there are negligible differences between the analytical subgroups in Hungary. Slightly more potential migrants have access to the internet and a car compared to the national average; these are important prerequisites for the planned intensification of spatial mobility. The penetration of ICT (information and communication technology) among Hungarians in Austria is almost 100%. However, proportionately fewer people have a car, a television and a washing machine than those surveyed in Hungary, but this is rarely because they cannot afford them. The MIGWELL survey specifically asked about electronic devices owned by households in Austria. Some Hungarians living a transnational life regularly 'commute' between their households in Hungary and Austria, so they do not always need, for example, a washing machine. Furthermore, 60% of those without a car live in Vienna, where advanced public transport makes car ownership unnecessary.

7.3. Economic status and job

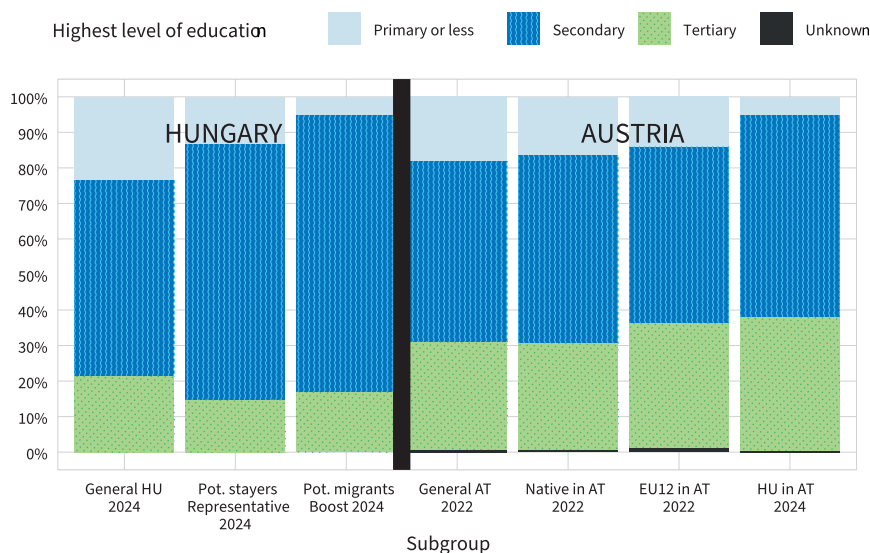
Since the MIGWELL project aims to study the SWB–migration nexus from a micro-perspective, instead of using aggregated macro-data, we focus on individual-level indicators. These objective, personal attributes are directly related to people's job satisfaction and also affect their overall subjective well-being. However, according to the OECD How's Life report (2013: 29), there are very few reliable and internationally comparable databases on employment quality. Therefore, in addition to the available information from the EU-SILC dataset on people's self-defined current economic status, occupation, and highest level of education (Németh et al., 2023), we were able to include further questions in the MIGWELL surveys. Overqualification, the duration of the employment contract, and the opportunity to move to a higher position or gain more autonomy at the workplace are indicators that help assess employment quality more effectively.

In the representative Hungarian MIGWELL survey, the share of people who have completed only primary education is 23.6%, 55% have completed secondary education and 21.5% tertiary education. Among the subgroups of potential stayers and potential migrants, having a maximum of secondary education is more common (covering four out of five people planning to emigrate). Only 5% of potential migrants have completed only primary education, while the share of individuals with tertiary education is close to the national average (17%).

According to 2022 EU-SILC data, Austria has a smaller share of people who have only completed primary education (18%) and a greater share with a higher education (30%) than Hungary. This is true for native-born people and even more so for the immigrants from the new EU Member States, including Hungarians.

According to the 2016 microcensus, the share of Hungarians with only primary education among Hungarian employees residing permanently in Austria was 5%, and the share with tertiary education was 25% (17% for men and 32% for women; Horváth, 2022: 118). In the MIGWELL sample, approximately one-third of respondents had a diploma. This may be partly explained by the slight female overrepresentation in the sample, which includes a larger proportion of graduates, or the snowball sampling method. However, it may also indicate a real change compared to the estimate eight years ago. (It is worth noting that the share of Hungarians living permanently in other foreign countries with tertiary education was already 33.6% in 2016; Horváth, 2022: 116).

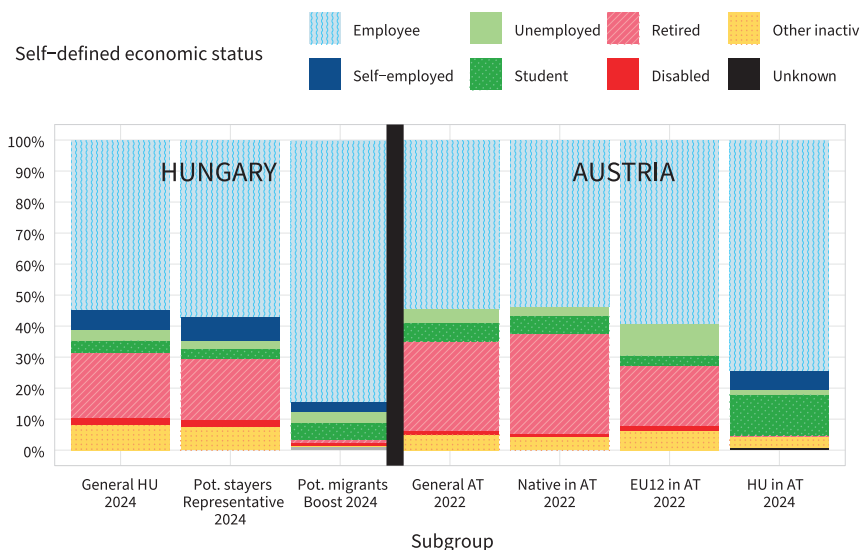
Figure 12. Share of individuals according to highest level of education by analytical subgroup



Source of data: EU-SILC 2022, MIGWELL surveys. Authors' figure.

In Hungary, the distribution of those planning to emigrate by *economic status* differs radically from that of the representative national sample. As many as 84.5% of potential emigrants are employees, compared with 54.9% in the national sample and 57.1% among potential stayers. There are very few retired people among them, and the self-employed rate is also lower than the national average. In contrast, the proportion of unemployed persons and students is larger. In Austria, the self-employed category is missing in the EU-SILC database. Nevertheless, it can be seen that the share of employed persons is roughly the same as in Hungary, but with a relatively larger share of students and pensioners. For immigrants from the new EU Member States, the economically inactive population is much smaller than the Austrian average (27% and 35%, respectively). In the non-representative Hungarian sample from the Austrian MIGWELL survey, students were over-represented, accounting for 13% of respondents, compared to the national average of 6%. This is to some extent a consequence of the snowball sampling approach. The large proportion of employees is not surprising, however, given the generally young age composition of Hungarians in Austria, many of whom are “target earners” (Németh et al., 2023).

Figure 13. Share of individuals according to current economic status by analytical subgroup



Source of data: EU-SILC 2022, MIGWELL surveys. Authors' figure.

Regarding the ISCO categories, there are relatively modest differences between the Hungarian subgroups compared to the national sample. However, the proportion of both the highest prestige occupations (ISCO 1-3: managers, professionals, technicians and associate professionals: 16.7% in total compared to 19.6% in the national sample) and low prestige occupations requiring no qualifications (6% compared to 13.5% in the national sample) is slightly lower among those planning to emigrate. The other ISCO categories – with the exception of skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers – are over-represented among potential emigrants. In particular, clerical support workers and service and sales workers often have a strong intention to migrate: they account for 43% of all potential emigrants.

The share of individuals in the highest-prestige occupations (managers, professionals, technicians, and associate professionals) is greatest among the Austrian-born analytical subgroup (43.7% after excluding non-respondents). For immigrants from the new EU Member States and Hungarians, the figures are 26.6% and 31.5% after excluding non-respondents. This is much higher than Horváth (2022: 120) found on the basis of the 2016 Hungarian microcensus (17%). By contrast, the MIGWELL survey slightly underestimated the categories of 'craft and related trades workers'

and ‘plant and machine operators, and assemblers’ (15.4% compared to 23% in the microcensus), and this is particularly true for elementary occupations (9% compared to 20% in the microcensus). The largest group is populated by service and sales workers: about one-third of respondents belong to this category, compared to only one in five nationally. This figure is consistent with Horváth’s findings, who calculated that 31% of Hungarians in Austria could be classified into this category in 2016. In summary, the non-representative MIGWELL survey in Austria presumably reached a larger proportion of higher-skilled Hungarians than lower-skilled ones.

A comparison of the distributions by educational attainment and current occupational structures reveals a significant presence of *overeducated* Hungarians in Austria – a phenomenon that is not new. Drawing on data from the 2016 Hungarian microcensus, Horváth (2022: 118) found that approximately one-third of Hungarians in the Austrian labour market were employed in positions below their level of education. The situation was particularly acute among mothers with children left behind in Hungary, 85% of whom were working in roles that did not match their qualifications (Horváth 2022: 136-137). Similar findings emerged from the 2024 MIGWELL survey: excluding respondents who refused to answer, 30% of Hungarians in Austria identified themselves as overqualified for their jobs.

There is little difference between subgroups in the duration of employment contracts. The proportion of Hungarian respondents in Austria with a fixed-term employment contract is slightly higher (14%) than in Hungary (7-8%). About 5% of respondents stated that they are currently working without an official work contract. In reality, the figure is probably higher: on the one hand, not everyone dares to admit this in a survey; on the other hand, as seen above, the MIGWELL survey reached relatively few people in elementary occupations. (According to empirical experience, this situation is most common in agriculture and construction.)

Excluding non-respondents, there is relatively little difference between sub-groups in Hungary regarding their perceived opportunity to achieve a *higher position at work*. Among potential migrants, 29.5% believe advancing in their job is at least somewhat realistic, compared with 35% among potential stayers. In contrast, the figure is significantly higher among Hungarians in Austria, with 56.6% expressing a similar outlook.

7.4. Housing conditions

In the OECD How's Life framework, housing conditions were captured by three headline indicators: the number of rooms per person, housing costs, and the number of dwellings lacking basic facilities (OECD, 2013). Since a lack of basic facilities does not pose a widespread problem in Hungarian or Austrian households, we focus on the reported housing problems which directly affect people's satisfaction with their housing situation.

As Németh et al. (2023: 40-41) pointed out, respondents in Hungary more frequently reported different types of internal *housing problems*. According to the EU-SILC, leaking roofs, rot in window frames and the floor, damp walls/floors or foundations (22% vs. 10%), and dark rooms (8.5% vs. 5.5%) were almost twice as frequent in Hungary as in Austria. On the other hand, external negative factors, such as street noise, crime and vandalism in the area, pollution, dirt, and other environmental problems, seem to be more prevalent in Austria.

Considering the analytical subgroups in this research report, potential emigrants rate housing problems slightly worse across all aspects we examined. In particular, there is a significant difference in the level of noise from neighbours and from the street. However, this can be explained by the fact that the non-representative sample of potential emigrants includes a larger proportion of people living in densely populated settlements who are more likely to encounter such problems.

It is also interesting to note that, compared to the Hungarian population, some problems are less frequent in the neighbourhoods where Hungarian households in Austria live (e.g., pollution, dirt, or other environmental problems), while others are more frequent (e.g., dark rooms, noise from neighbours or the street). Regarding crime, violence, and vandalism, there are no differences in perceptions between the analysed subgroups; only 4-5% reported that this is a problem in the area they live in.

While the representative sample in Hungary found that 86% of individuals live in their *own property* (or live with a close relative of the owner, i.e., a partner, spouse, or child), only 24% of Hungarians in Austria do so. This is not a surprising discrepancy, since, as the expert interviews showed, property prices are much higher in Austria, and it is not realistic for most immigrants to accumulate the necessary wealth to purchase their own dwelling.

Also, not surprisingly, those who do not plan to leave Hungary are slightly more likely to be homeowners than potential emigrants (87% and 81% respectively). On the one hand, the desire to buy a house or flat is

one of the main drivers for Hungarians wanting to work in Austria. On the other hand, in general, people who rent are characterised by greater flexibility and more active spatial mobility. The relative majority of Hungarians in Austria rent the whole dwelling (42%), but one in five of those interviewed rent only part of the dwelling. People living in commercial accommodation are typically hotel workers who receive accommodation in the latter buildings from their employer (2% in the sample).

7.5. Household composition

The theory called ‘new economics and sociology of labour migration’ (NELM) underlines that migration decisions are usually made by families and households, rather than by isolated individuals (see Chapter 4.2). Therefore, it was important to ask survey respondents to provide information on the size and composition of their households. In the Hungarian sample, this was done without any problems, but in Austria, several complicating factors arose. We therefore included a brief clarification of what the household concept is in general and how it should be interpreted in practice.²²

We are well aware that, according to statistical definitions, each individual is assigned to a single household based on their ‘usual residence’, which is typically determined by where they spend the majority of their time.²³ However, field experience has shown that this rigid statistical thinking is sometimes incompatible with the way people – especially transnational migrants – experience this situation in practice. What is more, it does not

²² ‘What is a household?’

A household is made up of persons who live together in a dwelling or part of a dwelling and share at least part of the household’s expenses (e.g. food, daily expenses). Dependent persons are also members of the household.

Many Hungarians living in Austria are members of two households: one in Hungary (often with other members of their family living there) and one in Austria. If this applies to you, please answer the question below accordingly!

Note: If you live with tenants and only pay rent together, this is a one-person household. It is also a one-person household if you live alone, and get accommodation from your employer, e.g. in a hotel.’

²³ An example from a publication of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office illustrates this situation. ‘A husband works in a distant settlement, resides in a worker’s accommodation, and spends only the weekends with his family. ... Consequently, the husband is not considered a member of the resident household at the dwelling where the census is conducted. Instead of being classified as a family consisting of a married couple and children, the household is recorded as a single-parent family (the wife’s marital status is adjusted to ‘mother’). ... The husband is classified as a resident member of an institutional household as a single individual in the other municipality’ (KSH 2006: 29).

seem logically justified to separate, for example, a family member working in Austria from their household in Hungary just because they spend most of their time as a one-person household in Austria. Since they bring a significant part of their income back to Hungary – and their ‘left-behind’ family members use this to finance their daily expenses – without the person working abroad, the income per capita indicator for the Hungarian household would be incorrect. We therefore concluded that, in the Austrian MIGWELL survey, we should leave open the possibility for respondents to belong to two households if they considered this a valid representation of their living situation. We asked the following questions about this topic:

- How many people are living in your household in Hungary, if you have one (including you)?
- How many people are living in your household in Austria (including you)?
- Who do you live with in a flat in Austria? You can tick more than one answer. Please also indicate the number of persons in each category! (E.g. how many children under 6 years of age live with you)

Despite our best efforts, we were unable to construct a reliable profile of these ‘dual’ households, as the numbers of persons living in the two households that were provided were sometimes mathematically problematic. Nevertheless, the parameters for the Austrian households are still accurate, and the existence of a second household in Hungary can also be confirmed.

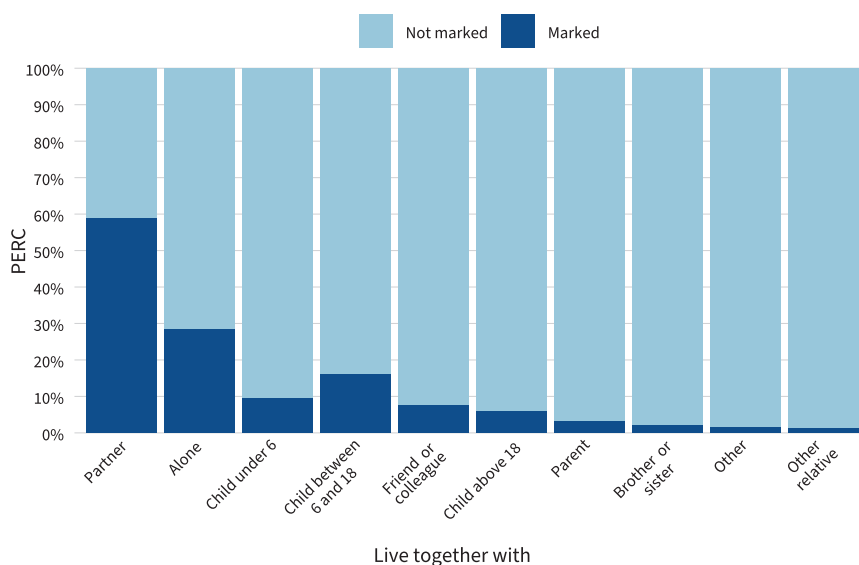
According to the representative MIGWELL survey, the average *household size in Hungary is 2.7 persons*. This value is slightly lower for the households of potential stayers and slightly higher for those of potential migrants (2.6 and 2.9, respectively). According to the EU-SILC survey, the average household size in Austria was also 2.7 in 2022. Hungarian households in Austria are slightly smaller than those of the native-born population, but also smaller than those of migrants from the new EU Member States (2.3 persons on average).

Twenty-one per cent of Hungarian respondents in Austria reported a household size of more than zero in Hungary, and 63% answered yes to the question of whether they maintain a registered address in Hungary (either permanent or temporary). These are clear indicators of strong transnational ties.

Finally, we asked *with whom* Hungarians in Austria live in a dwelling. Twenty-eight per cent of respondents live alone, while 72% share an apartment with at least one other person. They most often live with a partner

(59%) and children (31% in total), with colleagues and friends in third place (7.4%).

Figure 14. Living together in Austria.



Source of data: MIGWELL surveys. Authors' figure.

7.6. Social connections

As well-being and people's aspirations are always shaped by the social contexts in which they exist, we also incorporate the relational dimension into our research. This dimension concerns the social relationships individuals need to form to meet their human needs. Within our research framework, we therefore consider not only material aspects but also other intangible indicators of quality of life, such as social connections, health status, work-life balance and other external factors.

Some indicators relating to household size and composition have already been presented in the previous chapter. In the following section, in addition to marital status and the presence of a partner, we will also examine the reliability of social connections, including the frequency of contact with family and friends, whether individuals have someone to dis-

cuss personal matters with, access to material and non-material support, and the general level of trust in others.

Regarding *marital status*, in Hungary, almost 41% of potential emigrants have never been married. This is much higher than both the national average and the rate among those with no migration intentions (25% and 23% respectively), and is in line with our previous finding that those considering emigration tend to be younger. An even larger proportion is observed among Hungarians living in Austria: nearly half of the MIGWELL survey participants reported that they had never married. In contrast, the distribution is reversed when looking at widowed individuals: while 7% of the total Hungarian population and 6% of the population in Austria are widowed, the proportion falls to only 1% among potential emigrants and 2% among Hungarians in Austria. Among Hungarians in Austria, the proportion of divorced individuals is slightly higher than the Hungarian average (8.7% compared with 7.8%). Our narrative interviews indicated that many people move to Austria following a divorce, either due to financial difficulties or in search of a 'fresh start'.

For subjective well-being, especially its affective dimension, the *presence of a partner* might be more important than marital status. Of course, one may be officially divorced or widowed and still be in a happy relationship. Among the analytical groups we examined, Hungarians in Austria and potential emigrants in Hungary are associated with the largest proportion of individuals in a relationship (72% and 70%, respectively).

Looking at the number of people with whom one can *discuss personal matters*, our survey results show that those with migration intentions have the widest support networks: only 3% report having no one at all, half have up to three such connections, and 43% have more than three people they can rely on. Among Hungarians living in Austria, the question was asked separately for Hungary and Austria in order to capture the complexity and transnational nature of their social ties. The number of contacts follows a broadly similar pattern in the two countries, although Austrian connections appear slightly more prominent: half of the respondents have 1–3 trusted contacts in Hungary, while two-thirds have a similar number in Austria. However, a larger proportion of respondents report having no one to turn to – 15% in Hungary and 9% in Austria – suggesting greater social isolation within this group.

Table 5. Having people (not counting family members) with whom to discuss intimate and personal matters by analytical subgroup (%)

	General HU 2024	Pot. stayers Representative 2024	Pot. migrants Boost 2024	HU in AT 2024 (friends in Hungary)	HU in AT 2024 (friends in Austria)
No one at all	7.0	5.7	3.0	15.0	9.4
3 persons or fewer	67.0	67.4	53.6	54.8	65.8
More than three persons	23.0	23.8	43.4	23.0	19.7
NA	2.8	3.0	0.0	6.5	5.1

Source of data: EU-SILC 2022, MIGWELL surveys. Authors' calculation.

Although about half (47.7%) of Hungarians living in Austria stated they have both Hungarians and Austrians and people from other backgrounds among their friends, 23.5% claimed to have rather Hungarians, and another 20.6% rather Austrians among their friends.

Transnational personal connections are also more salient among those planning to migrate: while only about half of the Hungarian population has a family member or friend/acquaintance *living abroad*, 83% of those planning to migrate reported such connections.

Trust is often seen as a foundational element of social cohesion that underpins cooperation, solidarity, a sense of belonging and, indirectly, subjective well-being. It is an invisible glue that holds societies together, and plays a pivotal role in linking micro-level interactions with macro-level societal stability (Uslaner, 2002; Freitag and Traunmüller, 2009; Dragolov et al., 2018, etc.). The participants in the narrative interviews most often emphasized that, in their view, people in Austria trust each other much more in everyday life.

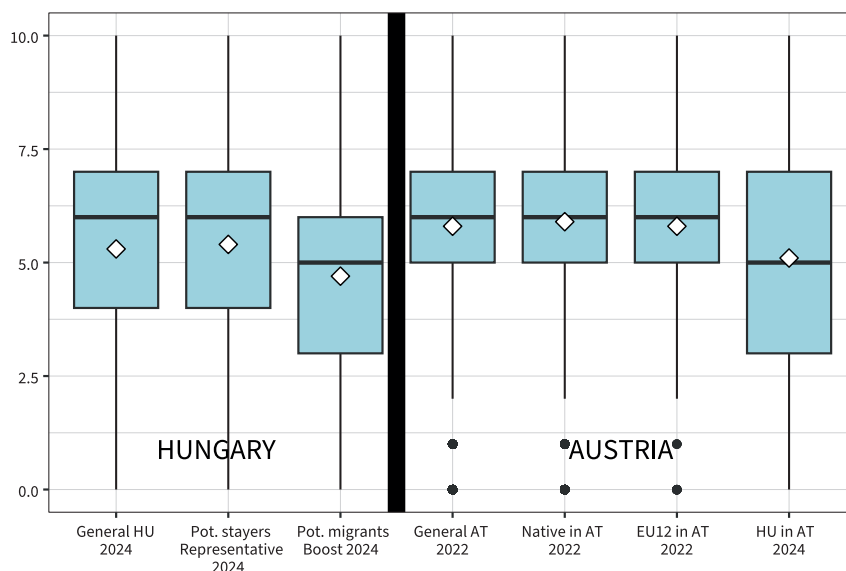
“Let me give you an example. When my wife first came here [to Austria], we went on some little trips. By the roadside, there are these small seasonal wooden stalls with honesty boxes. You go into the little stall, and they sell seasonal produce. At that time, we bought asparagus, but sometimes they have tomatoes, squash, peppers – whatever’s in season. The prices are written there, and there’s an honesty box. ... My wife said, “Is this for real?” She didn’t believe that something like this could exist. “Do you know what would happen back home?” she said. Well, I know – they wouldn’t

just steal the asparagus, they'd take the wooden stall and the cash box too. That's why I say, when you live in an environment like this, it's no longer about money." (50–54-year-old man, house painter, Austria)

Nevertheless, statistical data reveal no major difference in general trust levels between the analytical subgroups of this study. Overall trust appears to be slightly lower in Hungary than in Austria indeed, with an average score of 5.3 on a 0–10 scale compared with 5.8 in Austria. However, both individuals considering migration and those who have already migrated display lower levels of trust: potential migrants score an average of 4.7, while Hungarian migrants living in Austria score 5.1. When focusing on trust in people living in one's neighbourhood, the level of trust in Hungary is higher than generalised trust (an average of 5.8 on a 0–10 scale). In contrast, the neighbourhood-level trust of potential migrants and Hungarians living in Austria is lower, with both groups scoring an average of 5.1.

"The relationships haven't changed at all. Those [friends back in Hungary] have remained just as close. It's the same with my family, too. ... This part is more difficult [the development of social relationships in Austria]. I worked at McDonald's with other Hungarians – we got along really well, but that only lasted as long as I worked there. That's actually a problem: I don't really have Austrian friends. The people I hang out with here, my friends, are all Hungarians. I do notice [discrimination against foreigners], but not directed at us. ... I see Austrians sometimes laughing together about certain nationalities. It's interesting – with us, or at least that's how I feel, they're quite accepting. Somehow they don't really see Hungarians as immigrants." (40–44-year-old man, food-service worker, Austria)

Figure 15. Trust in other people by analytical subgroup
(mean values on a 0-10 scale).



Source of data: EU-SILC 2022, MIGWELL surveys. Authors' figure.

Despite the differences in the frequency of contact with friends and family, a similarly large proportion of respondents in Austria (84%) and Hungary (89%) report that they can ask relatives, friends, or neighbours for help. This proportion is even greater among potential migrants in Hungary (94%) and Hungarians living in Austria (91%). When distinguishing between material and non-material help, it becomes apparent that asking for financial assistance is a more sensitive matter, as fewer respondents felt they could request such support. In contrast, among Hungarian migrants living in Austria, it is non-material assistance that appears to be more difficult to obtain: only 58% say they could ask relatives, friends, or neighbours for this type of help. This reflects the transnational nature of their support networks, with important ties remaining in Hungary while new ones are formed in Austria. When non-material help – often requiring physical presence – is needed, having one's social network spread across two countries may present a challenge.

Table 6. Proportion of individuals able to ask for material or non-material help from relatives, friends, or neighbours by analytical subgroup (%)

	General HU 2024	Pot. stayers Representative 2024	Pot. migrants Boost 2024	HU in AT 2024
Material help	78.8	79.5	87.1	84.5
Non-material help	85.7	86.6	92.3	58.1
Any kind of help	89.0	89.3	94.0	91.3

Source of data: EU-SILC 2022, MIGWELL surveys. Authors' calculations.

Beyond people's personal connections, their membership in associations, which fosters a sense of embeddedness and creates networks, also affects their quality of life and well-being. In this respect, the share of respondents who are not members of any association is an interesting indicator: 75% of Hungarians do not have any such membership, and this lack of engagement is even greater among those intending to migrate (82%), while it is lower among Hungarians living in Austria (68%).

Surveying perceived social exclusion is important because it captures how individuals feel about their place in society – offering insights beyond those derivable from objective measures such as income or employment. Feelings of being left out, undervalued, or disrespected can undermine mental health, social trust, and civic participation, all of which are vital for social cohesion and subjective well-being.

In Hungary, 9.5% of those planning to emigrate 'rather agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with the statement *'I feel excluded from society.'* Among Hungarians living in Austria, the corresponding share is somewhat lower (7.4%), a proportion consistent with EU-SILC survey results for immigrants from the new EU Member States. It is worth noting, however, that 25% of Hungarians in Austria gave a 'partly yes, partly no' response, meaning that roughly one-third perceive at least some degree of social exclusion.

"Obviously, at home you always feel at home. But here [Austria], no matter how many years you spend, you'll always be, so to speak, just a guest – a foreigner" (35–39-year-old woman, childhood educator, Austria)

We also find only very small differences regarding whether respondents *feel looked down upon* because of their work or income. Compared to the Hungarian national average (6.5%), the proportion is slightly higher among potential emigrants (8.2%), while 6.8% of Hungarians living in Austria report feeling this way.

7.7. Health status

Health is one of the most important determinants of well-being, as it directly affects individuals' ability to carry out daily activities that contribute to a good quality of life. Although it would be logical to start the assessment of this factor by collecting objective medical data, asking respondents about specific illnesses or disabilities is incompatible with ethical and data-protection principles. Instead, we rely on self-assessed health status and on whether respondents feel that their activities are limited by their health (problems). This approach captures both physical and mental aspects and reflects the overall perception of health rather than specific conditions.

Previous results (Németh et al., 2023) have already shown that perceived health was better in Austria than in Hungary in 2013 and 2018. Our recent data confirm this trend: 62.6% of respondents in Hungary (2024) and 69.8% in Austria (2022) reported being in good or very good health.

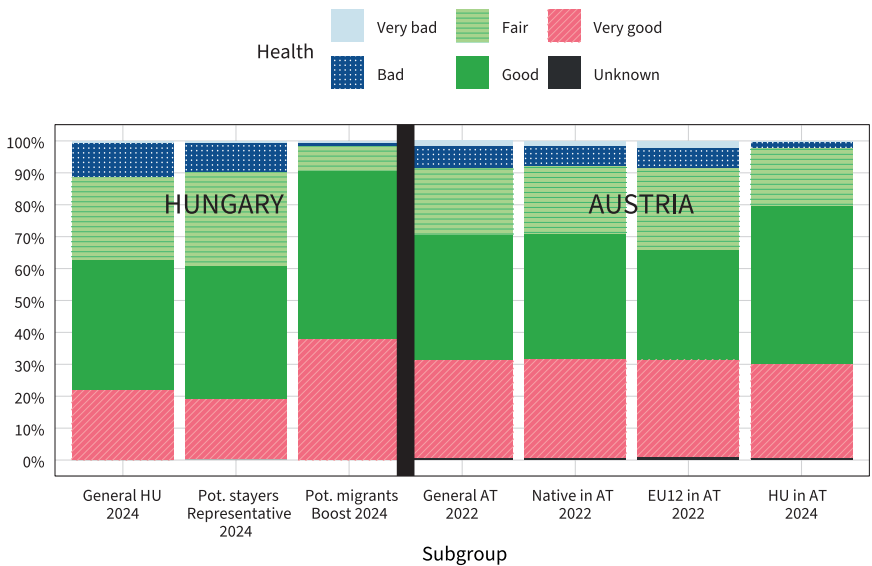
“The attitude towards life is different. People are healthier. My mum [in Hungary] is seventy-six, and I can’t persuade her to walk two kilometres a day. Here [in Austria], my neighbour Maria is ninety. I ask her, “How are you, Maria?” – “I’m off to the shop,” she says. And she really does go every day. Once a week she goes to the hairdresser, and to church. And we live up in the mountains – so it’s up and down, all the time. The other neighbour is eighty-two – honestly, when she dresses up, you turn your head after her in the street”

(55–59-year-old man, house caretaker, Austria)

Those planning to migrate from Hungary evaluate their health far more positively, with 90.6% reporting good or very good health. This aligns with earlier empirical findings suggesting that migrants – and those considering migration – tend to be in better health, either because they are on

average younger or because healthier individuals are more likely to consider migrating. Interestingly, this difference is slightly smaller for Hungarians already living in Austria; nevertheless, their self-reported health remains better (79.1%) than that of the native Austrian population (70.4%) or immigrants from the new EU Member States (65.1%).

Figure 16. Perceived health by analytical subgroup.



Source of data: EU-SILC 2022, MIGWELL surveys. Authors' figure.

According to earlier EU-SILC data (2013 and 2018), there was no notable difference between Austria and Hungary in the share of individuals reporting severe limitations in their daily activities due to health problems (around 7–10%). However, the proportion reporting some limitations was slightly lower in Hungary (18–19%) than in Austria (25%). The MIGWELL survey data only partly confirm these patterns: in Hungary 8% reported severe limitations (which matches again the 2022 Austrian average), while 25% reported some limitations (four percentage points higher than the Austrian average) due to health conditions.

Consistent with previous findings, the proportion of Hungarians with health-related limitations is much lower among those planning to migrate (7.7%). In contrast, Hungarians already living in Austria resemble the Austrian population and other immigrants from the new EU Member

States: 26.7% report being severely or otherwise restricted, with only 3.5% reporting a severe restriction (compared to 28.5% among the latter group).

It should be emphasised that perceived limitations may also be influenced by differing cultural contexts, as well as by country-specific regulations, institutional practices, and policies regarding the diagnosis and official recognition of health-related restrictions.

7.8. Work-life balance

Another important aspect of subjective well-being concerns work-life balance: the extent to which individuals can devote time to family and leisure, and how much free time remains after work and commuting. In our research, this is operationalised through participation in leisure activities and the ability to meet friends.

These two EU-SILC indicators are valuable because they simultaneously reflect people's financial capacity and provide insight into how they spend their leisure time. (For this reason, one could argue that leisure participation could be subsumed under financial situation, while meeting friends could also belong under social connections.) Of course, in reality, many leisure activities are free, and social interactions do not necessarily involve eating or drinking with others; however, as proxy variables, they capture the essence of the phenomena reasonably well.

Being able to meet friends and family – both in terms of having the time and the financial means – is an important aspect of maintaining social connections. Earlier EU-SILC data showed that respondents in Austria were in a more favourable position: almost all of them (89–90%) reported being able to get together with friends or relatives for a drink or meal at least once a month. In Hungary, this proportion was considerably lower, though it slightly increased over time (reaching 63% in 2018). The gap can be explained in part by financial deprivation. These trends have remained broadly stable: in 2022 and 2024, 86.7% of Austrians and 62.7% of Hungarians were able to meet friends on at least a monthly basis. Hungarians with migration intentions, however, seem to be catching up with the Austrian level: 70% of them reported being able to meet up with friends at least once a month, and only 3.7% said they could not afford it. Hungarians living in Austria show a very similar pattern to native Austrians, with 81.6% meeting friends monthly and only 2.6% unable to afford doing so.

While 71.7% of respondents in Austria regularly take part in leisure activities, only 37.6% of respondents in Hungary report doing so. Activities

such as sports, going to the cinema, or attending concerts often involve costs (entrance fees, travel expenses) that can be prohibitive for some. Indeed, a larger share of Hungarian respondents say they do not participate in leisure activities because they cannot afford them (18%, compared with 8% in Austria). However, the proportion of those who do not take part in leisure activities for other reasons is also substantially higher in Hungary (43.8%) than in Austria (20%). These patterns have remained broadly stable over time.

Hungarians with migration intentions, however, are more active: 50.6% regularly engage in leisure activities, and the share of those unable to participate due to cost is similar to the Hungarian average (17.6%). This finding once again reinforces our earlier conclusion that potential migrants tend to be younger and, in certain respects, financially better off. An even larger share of Hungarians living in Austria (65.5%) take part in leisure activities, although their participation rate is still below that of native Austrians. This is mainly not due to affordability: only 6.1% of them report that cost prevents them from doing so.

7.9. External factors

Previously, we examined characteristics relating to individuals or their micro-level relationships – factors that respondents could ultimately evaluate through a general ‘satisfaction with...’ question. However, satisfaction and happiness are also shaped by external circumstances. Given the potentially vast number of influencing factors, the following section highlights only a few examples that were included in the MIGWELL survey conducted in Hungary and/or Austria.

Regarding perceived public safety, the situation in Hungary appears to have improved since the 2016 Hungarian microcensus, when 69% of respondents reported feeling fairly or very safe. In our survey, 83.6% of Hungarians stated that they felt fairly safe or very safe when walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark. The proportion feeling very safe (35.6%) is even higher among potential migrants (41.2%) and Hungarians living in Austria (42.3%).

*“Here, I can walk around at night as a woman, almost anywhere, perfectly calmly – it never even crosses my mind that anything could happen”
(50–54-year-old woman, childcare worker, Austria)*

At the same time, perceptions of personal safety are somewhat polarised among Hungarians living in Austria: the share of those feeling slightly unsafe (10.3%) is similar to that of the general Hungarian population (13.6%) and higher than among Hungarians planning to migrate (3.9%).

Opinions about the country's economic situation were collected only in the Hungarian survey. These perceptions are clearly most negative among those planning to migrate. While 15.6% of the general population considers the economic situation to be very bad, this share rises to 23.6% among potential migrants – meaning that not just half, but roughly two-thirds of them hold a negative view ('bad' or 'very bad') of the economy overall. Expectations for the future follow a similar pattern: potential migrants are the least optimistic group, with only 5.2% expecting the situation to improve slightly, compared with 13% in the general population.

Trust in institutions also reflects how people evaluate the country's overall performance. In Hungary, the police are the most trusted institution, followed by the legal system; trust in the government, the political system, and Parliament is lower, and trust in the media is the lowest of all. Potential migrants show the same ranking but consistently express lower levels of trust.

Hungarians living in Austria display a somewhat different level of trust toward Hungarian institutions, although the overall level of distrust mirrors that of potential migrants: they place the most trust in the legal system and the least in the government. However, their trust in Austrian institutions is markedly higher across all areas, with the legal system and the media being the most trusted.

Table 7. Trust in institutions by analytical subgroup (mean values on a 0-10 scale).

<i>Do you have trust in the...</i>	General HU 2024	Pot. stayers Representative 2024	Pot. migrants Boost 2024	HU in AT 2024 (Hungarian institutions)	HU in AT 2024 (Austrian institutions)
... police?	5.5	5.7	4.5	3.6	6.1
... legal system?	4.9	5.1	4.2	5.2	7.6
... government?	3.9	4.0	3.0	3.1	5.5
... political system?	3.8	3.9	3.1	3.5	6.4
... Parliament?	3.8	3.9	3.1		
... media?	3.6	3.7	3.1	4.6	7.6

Source of data: EU-SILC 2022, MIGWELL surveys. Authors' calculations.

Attitudes toward the political system and the media most often appeared in the narrative interviews in the form of respondents describing the situation in Hungary as discouraging, and generally expressing less trust in Hungarian institutions than in Austrian ones.

"I watch quite a lot of TV in Austria. ... The Hungarian news broadcast is so negative compared to an Austrian one, it's unbelievable. You can't even compare them. ... What I hear from family and friends – everyone mentions unpredictability as the main problem in Hungary. And also, the politics and the poster campaigns. When we went home after Covid... The number of times I was hit in the face by propaganda on billboards... After one and a half or two years of calm, encountering that again really hits you hard. I honestly felt bad. My mood just got worse, that's how I'd put it. ... We even pay for YouTube Premium because I don't want to hear that stuff." (35–39-year-old, man, post-doc researcher, Austria)

8. Subjective well-being patterns among Hungarians living in Hungary and Austria

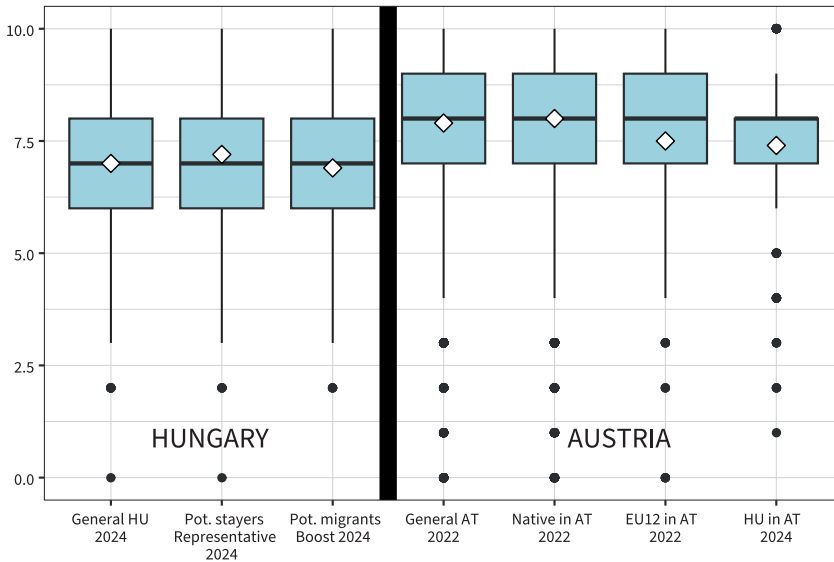
8.1. Overall life satisfaction

Overall life satisfaction is the most frequently used indicator of subjective well-being in large-scale surveys. The related question is simple, short, and understandable across different countries and populations because it is less dependent on cultural norms. Overall life satisfaction, measured on a 0-10 scale, has always been higher in Austria than in Hungary since it was measured. However, the gap has slightly decreased since the first round of EU-SILC. The national average was 6.1 in Hungary and 7.8 in Austria by 2013, and these scores had increased to 6.9 and 7.9, respectively, by 2022.

The representative MIGWELL survey shows an almost identical value (7.0) for the Hungarian population by 2024. The discrepancy between potential migrants and potential stayers is not particularly large; 6.9 for those who plan to leave Hungary and 7.2 for those who do not. In Austria, overall life satisfaction is highest among native-born people (8.0), while immigrants from the new EU Member States are generally less satisfied (7.5). According

to our survey, Hungarians in Austria tend to evaluate their lives similarly (7.4). This value is slightly higher than that of all subsamples in Hungary.

Figure 17. Overall life satisfaction by analytical subgroup



Source of data: EU-SILC 2022, MIGWELL surveys 2024. Authors' figure.

8.2. Domain satisfaction

Examining domain-specific factors enables researchers to pinpoint the areas of life that most strongly influence personal subjective well-being. It is crucial to recognise, however, that individuals prioritise different domains depending on their personal circumstances. For instance, work-life balance might play a more significant role in overall SWB for younger people, whereas older generations may place greater emphasis on health issues.

The general 2022 EU-SILC database contains three domain satisfaction variables: respondents' satisfaction with their household's financial situation, their social relationships, and the time they have available for things they like to do (time use). Additionally, satisfaction with personal income, housing situation and main occupation was also surveyed in Austria. (In the latter case, we selected the economically active respondents to obtain comparable values.) The MIGWELL surveys covered not only these vari-

ables, but also people's satisfaction with external factors that were either part of earlier EU-SILC rounds (living environment, green areas) or were considered highly relevant during the narrative interviews (satisfaction with the quality and accessibility of public services).

The items can be classified into three main categories: satisfaction with material, non-material and external factors of well-being.

When looking at the primary data for Hungary, the pattern is fairly consistent: the domain satisfaction of potential stayers is slightly higher in most cases (+0.1 or +0.2 surpluses), and that of potential emigrants is lower by -0.2 to -0.9 than the national average. The exceptions are satisfaction with personal contacts and green areas, where differences between the subgroups studied are negligible. For health, the relationship is the reverse, with potential emigrants more satisfied with their health status. This is hardly surprising, given the fact that their average age is lower. In Hungary, the lowest satisfaction scores are associated with personal and household income, and, among external factors, respondents are most dissatisfied with public services.

The data pattern for Austria is also similar across all satisfaction domains. The satisfaction of native-born people tends to be slightly higher than the national average, while the satisfaction of immigrants from new EU countries is lower or somewhat lower than the national average.

The satisfaction of Hungarians in Austria with material goods is notably higher than both the Hungarian average and that of potential emigrants. There is one exception: satisfaction with housing conditions is slightly lower in Austria, and only compared to potential emigrants is there a minimal surplus. Satisfaction with social contacts and available leisure time, on the other hand, is clearly lower among Hungarians living in Austria. The largest difference among the aspects taken into account is in satisfaction with the quality and availability of public services: the gap is larger than two on a scale of 0-10 in favour of Austria.

Among these, during the narrative interviews, respondents most often expressed particularly positive opinions about the functioning of the healthcare system.

“Or, for example, healthcare itself – that’s another major difference. Once, I don’t even remember exactly, I think it was a lung screening. At first, I thought I’d somehow ended up in a private clinic. But it was just an ordinary local GP. And I was examined almost straight away. I went in on Monday, and got an appointment for Wednesday. Something like that

would be unthinkable back home [in Hungary]” (40–44-year-old man, food-service worker, Austria)

Table 8. Average domain satisfaction scores by analytical subgroup

	Avg. HU	Pot. stayers HU	Pot. migrants HU	Avg. AT (2022)	Native in AT (2022)	EU12 in AT (2022)	Hun in AT	Diff.: Hun in AT vs. Avg. HU	Diff.: Hun in AT vs. pot. migr.	Diff.: Hun in AT vs. Avg. AT
<i>Material factors</i>										
HH's financial situation	6.2	6.4	6.0	7.3	7.6	6.7	7.1	+0.9	+1.1	-0.2
Personal income	5.9	6.1	5.3	6.9	7.1	5.9	7.1	+1.2	+1.8	+0.2
Job	6.8	7.0	6.4	7.5	7.6	6.9	7.1	+0.3	+0.7	-0.4
Accommodation	7.5	7.6	7.2	8.4	8.5	7.7	7.4	-0.1	+0.2	-1.0
<i>Non-material factors</i>										
Health	7.3	7.3	8.2	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	7.7	+0.4	-0.5	n.a.
Social relationships	7.7	7.8	7.8	8.6	8.7	8.3	7.5	-0.2	-0.3	-1.1
Time use	7.0	7.0	6.1	7.4	7.6	7.1	6.8	-0.2	+0.7	-0.6
<i>External factors</i>										
Living environment	7.4	7.5	7.2	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	7.4	0	+0.2	n.a.
Green areas	6.8	6.8	6.9	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	7.4	+0.6	+0.5	n.a.
Public services	5.4	5.5	5.0	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	7.5	+2.1	+2.5	n.a.

Source of data: EU-SILC 2022, MIGWELL surveys 2024. Authors' construction.

To summarise, the main conclusions of Table 8 are that the satisfaction of Hungarians in Austria with material goods is quite high, approaching and even exceeding the Austrian average in terms of satisfaction with personal income. (Here, the only exception is satisfaction with housing conditions). The relatively high SWB values are particularly striking compared to those of the Hungarian subsamples. For the non-material factors, however, the relationship is reversed: both in terms of satisfaction with social contacts and available leisure time, the lowest average values were measured among Hungarians in Austria. These indicators are not only

worse than in Hungary but also worse than those of immigrants from the new EU countries.

8.3. Affective well-being

Incorporating affective well-being metrics into surveys enables researchers to capture emotion-driven effects, offering a deeper understanding of how individuals truly feel in their daily lives and how various factors influence subjective well-being (SWB). This concept focuses on the frequency of positive and negative emotions, such as happiness, anxiety, and stress, shedding light on aspects of human behaviour that life-satisfaction measures alone may overlook.

The affective dimension of the SWB gap between the two countries is a long-standing phenomenon. In the MIGWELL research report, we summarised the changes in the national-level gap after 2013 (Németh et al., 2023: 59-61). This time, we focus on the analytical subgroups, as shown below.

Table 9 shows the proportion of respondents who chose the options ‘all of the time’ or ‘most of the time’ in the questionnaires of the EU-SILC or MIGWELL surveys. Perhaps the most striking conclusion is that the affective well-being scores of potential migrants are more favourable than those of those planning to stay across all the aspects we examined. This is an important part of the descriptive data analysis because it clarifies that affective well-being is not the main driver of emigration intentions.

In Austria, national averages are available for only two variables because the 2022 SILC questionnaire focused solely on happiness and loneliness. Based on our non-representative sample, Hungarians in Austria scored lower in both categories. However, compared with the Hungarian data, a more nuanced pattern emerges. Hungarians in Austria experience both positive and negative emotional states more frequently. They are more likely to feel happy and calm in Austria than in Hungary, yet also more prone to feelings of nervousness and depression. Notably, their average scores for loneliness and stress are higher (10.7% and 16.3%, respectively) than the Hungarian averages of 8.7% and 9.9%.

“The first three months were a trial period. ... But from then on, I was on my own. For a long time, I was alone. Sure, I spent the days with my col-

leagues, and my son was here for a while too, but for the most part, I was alone” (50–54-year-old man, house painter, Austria)

“I think Austrians are much calmer. More balanced. And I don’t think it’s just because of money or prosperity – it’s the way they were raised. Back home [in Hungary], it’s always about stress and nervousness” (45–49-year-old woman, senior-care worker, Austria)

“Apart from my family and friends, Hungary means stress to me. ... Here I earn 1,700 euros, plus accommodation and full board. And there’s a thirteenth and fourteenth month’s salary, too. I’m not a manager. I go in, do my job, say thank you, and go home. And I know that I’ll have work tomorrow, and I know that if I don’t, I can walk into any place here and within five minutes have another job – with about the same conditions, or even better.” (50–54-year-old man, waiter, Austria)

Table 9. Affective SWB scores by analytical subgroup. (Frequency: all of the time + most of the time answers, %, non-respondents are excluded)

	Avg. HU	Pot. stayers HU	Pot. migrants HU	Avg. AT (2022)	Native in AT (2022)	EU12 in AT (2022)	Hun in AT	Diff.: Hun in AT vs. Avg. HU	Diff.: Hun in AT vs. pot. migr.	Diff.: Hun in AT vs. Avg. AT
<i>Positive emotions</i>										
Happy	56.2	56.7	70.4	74.0	76.4	62.8	70.4	+14.2	0	–3.6
Calm, peaceful	52.3	52.2	61.0	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	69.3	+17.0	+8.3	n.a.
<i>Negative emotions</i>										
Nervous	7.7	6.9	5.2	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	8.1	+0.4	+2.9	n.a.
Downhearted, depressed	7.0	5.8	3.9	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	7.5	+0.5	+3.6	n.a.
Feeling down	6.4	5.5	2.1	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	4.6	–1.8	+2.5	n.a.
Lonely	8.7	7.4	2.6	4.3	3.4	6.9	10.7	+2.0	+8.1	+6.4
Stressed	9.9	9.0	8.6	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	16.3	+6.4	+7.7	n.a.

Source of data: EU-SILC 2022, MIGWELL surveys 2024. Authors’ construction.

8.4. Eudaimonic well-being

Eudaimonic variables receive far less attention in international surveys than cognitive and affective dimensions. However, incorporating measures of eudaimonia – which reflects a meaningful life and includes aspects such as autonomy, self-esteem, and self-actualisation – could offer a more comprehensive understanding of SWB. This approach would allow researchers and policymakers to account for psychological factors that play a crucial role in the perception of well-being.

An illustrative example of this approach is the EU-SILC survey, which last measured eudaimonic well-being in 2013. Recognising the importance of this dimension, the MIGWELL project incorporated three comparative questions into both parallel surveys. In the representative Hungarian survey, respondents rated their agreement on a scale from 0 to 10. The average scores were 6.9 for the statement ‘the things I do in life are meaningful’ and 7.0 for ‘I feel free to choose how to live my life.’ However, optimism scored somewhat lower, with an average of 6.3.

The pattern is similar to the domain satisfaction scores. Potential stayers reported slightly higher average scores than the national representative sample (by 0.1 points), while potential emigrants scored considerably lower (by 0.4–0.5 points).

In contrast, Hungarians living in Austria reported higher average scores across all three variables. The smallest difference was observed for ‘feeling free to live life’ (7.3, compared to 7.0 for the Hungarian average and 6.6 for potential migrants). The largest positive difference was seen in ‘general optimism about the future’ (7.6, compared to 6.3 for the Hungarian average and 5.9 for potential migrants).

8.5. Interrelations of different measures of subjective well-being

According to the Hungarian EU-SILC data, the different measures of subjective well-being are only weakly correlated. A stronger association exists between overall life satisfaction, satisfaction with the household’s financial situation, personal relationships, and different elements of affective well-being. In terms of the connections among different dimensions of subjective well-being, higher happiness (affective well-being) and the feeling that one’s life is worthwhile (eudaimonic well-being) imply higher ove-

rall satisfaction with life. Nevertheless, happiness and a life seen as worthwhile are only weakly connected.

In general, the analysis of Austrian data reveals a similar structure of subjective well-being correlations to those observed in Hungary. In both countries, overall life satisfaction is strongly and significantly associated with financial satisfaction (Austria: 0.582; Hungary: 0.596). This confirms that financial security is a key cognitive pillar of SWB, regardless of context. Not surprisingly, satisfaction with the household's financial situation is also strongly correlated with one's satisfaction with one's own income in Austria (0.675).

Across other cognitive variables, correlations are weak or moderate in both countries, except for the job satisfaction–income satisfaction nexus. However, some associations are weaker in Austria; for example, satisfaction with time use correlates less strongly with overall life satisfaction than in Hungary. This may reflect differences in working-time arrangements or more institutionalised work–life balance support, leading to weaker trade-offs between work and free time in Austria. Satisfaction with personal relations also stands out. It is moderately related to overall satisfaction in both countries.

Comparable patterns are identified for the affective dimension, showing that happiness correlates positively with overall satisfaction (in both countries 0.410), while negatively with loneliness (−0.438 in Hungary vs. −0.304 in Austria, respectively). This indicates that social isolation has a deep emotional impact everywhere.

In the MIGWELL project, we had the opportunity to examine people's subjective well-being in more detail. The two correlation matrices display how different SWB variables relate to each other among two groups: people living in Hungary (representative sample) and Hungarians living in Austria (snowball sample). The variables represent three dimensions of SWB: cognitive, affective, and eudaimonic well-being.

An important similarity between the two matrices is that the variables within each dimension exhibit stronger correlations. In contrast, affective–cognitive and affective–eudaimonic variables are less strongly related. An exception is the relationship between cognitive and eudaimonic variables: among these, especially among Hungarians living in Austria, we also find many medium- and strong correlations. One key implication is that assessing emotional states in a separate question block is clearly justified, as these variables add significant value and help refine the conclusions drawn from SWB research.

Cognitive dimension

In both samples, overall life satisfaction strongly and positively correlates with satisfaction in specific life domains such as finances, housing, job, health, and relationships. However, the correlations are generally stronger in the Austrian sample. For example, satisfaction with accommodation correlates with overall satisfaction at approximately $r \approx 0.518$ in Hungary, but $r \approx 0.571$ among Hungarians in Austria. Satisfaction with own income shows a similar pattern (Hungary: $r \approx 0.560$; Austria: $r \approx 0.606$).

This suggests that, for Hungarians living in Austria, satisfaction in individual life domains contributes more strongly to their overall life evaluation. Their well-being structure appears more 'compact': when an aspect of life is perceived as going well (e.g., finances, housing), it more strongly influences the global life evaluation.

Another key difference concerns job satisfaction and satisfaction with the household's financial situation. Not only are these factors more strongly correlated with overall satisfaction in Austria, but they are also strongly correlated with each other (Hungary: $r \approx 0.585$; Austria: $r \approx 0.643$). This fits the broader context: economic motives are often a major driver of migration, and the Austrian labour market offers more stability and higher financial rewards, strengthening the relationship between work-related and financial well-being.

Affective dimension

It is no surprise that positive emotions (e.g., happiness, calmness) correlate positively with life satisfaction in both samples, while negative emotions (stress, nervousness, feeling down) correlate negatively. However, these correlations are consistently stronger in the Austria sample. (For example: happiness–overall life satisfaction: Hungary: $r \approx 0.336$, Austria: $r \approx 0.406$; feeling lonely–overall life satisfaction: Hungary: $r \approx -0.258$, Austria: $r \approx -0.334$).

This indicates that affect plays a more central role in shaping overall life satisfaction among Hungarians in Austria. Migration, adaptation, and cultural adjustment may create a context where emotional experiences become more salient – emotional highs and lows have a stronger impact on evaluations of life.

Eudaimonic dimension

Both tables indicate the strong positive correlations among the eudaimonic variables. Yet again, the associations are strikingly stronger among

Hungarians in Austria. The most notable examples are the correlations between ‘meaningful life’ and overall life satisfaction (Hungary: $r \approx 0.432$; Austria: $r \approx 0.672$) as well as ‘choose life freely’ and overall life satisfaction (Hungary: $r \approx 0.381$; Austria: $r \approx 0.635$).

This is a substantial difference. It suggests that autonomy – the feeling of having control and freedom in life decisions – plays a much more central role in the well-being of Hungarian emigrants. Migration itself is a highly intentional act, often motivated by the desire for better opportunities and more agency. When these expectations are met, autonomy becomes a key psychological driver of well-being. Optimism also correlates more strongly with satisfaction indicators in Austria.

To sum up, life satisfaction, emotions, and eudaimonic well-being are interconnected in both cases. However, among Hungarians living in Austria, all correlations are systematically stronger, especially those involving income, autonomy, and emotional experiences. For migrants, life domains seem more interdependent. When the latter evaluate one aspect positively, this more powerfully influences their entire sense of well-being.

9. How does subjective well-being affect migration intentions in Hungary?

In the followings, going beyond description, we focus on the two-way relationship between the concepts of ‘well-being’ and ‘migration’. We explore how subjective well-being is associated with migration intentions, as well as the causal effects of migration on subjective well-being relying on multivariate statistical analysis, regression models.

Based on our representative Hungarian survey, we examined which social, economic, and well-being variables are associated with concrete migration intentions. Subjective well-being was analysed using three separate models, each operationalizing well-being through a different variable. The first model measured life satisfaction, the second happiness, and the third optimism. The text below reports the average marginal effects of the socioeconomic variables from the model that uses life satisfaction as the dependent variable (Model 1). Age emerges as an important factor: as individuals grow older, the likelihood of planning migration decreases.

The presence of a migration bubble, however, is associated with a higher probability of concrete migration intentions. Specifically, those with previous migration experience are associated with an average marginal effect of 0.12 (CI: 0.02–0.22), while having relatives or acquaintances

living abroad is associated with an effect of 0.10 (CI: 0.06–0.13). The type of settlement also proves to be a significant variable. Living in a sparsely populated area is associated with less likelihood of planning for migration than in a moderately populated area (0.04 [CI: 0.001–0.08]) or a densely populated one (0.05 [CI: –0.005–0.1]), although the latter is only significant at the $p < 0.1$ level. Residents of the Great Plain and North region are significantly less likely to have migration plans than those in Central Hungary (–0.08 [CI: –0.15 to –0.01]). No significant differences are observed with respect to gender, partnership status, or the presence of child(ren) under six years old. A negative association is found between life satisfaction and migration intention, indicating that less satisfied individuals are more likely to plan to migrate (–0.0084 [CI: –0.01–0.001], significant at $p < 0.1$).

A similarly negative relationship was identified for optimism (Model 3), with an average marginal effect of –0.086 [CI: –0.1 to –0.001]. In contrast, happiness (Model 2) shows a different pattern. Compared to those who report never or rarely being happy, individuals who feel happy some of the time (0.05 [CI: 0.01–0.1]) or most of the time (0.048 [CI: 0.001–0.09]) are significantly more likely to have concrete migration plans. Even reporting “always” being happy is associated with a positive effect (0.06 [CI: –0.006–0.13], significant at $p < 0.1$).

When the life satisfaction model was extended to include additional variables that capture social connectedness (Model 4), two further important associations emerged. First, consistent with the migration bubble hypothesis, a larger circle of friends is linked to stronger migration intentions (0.0078 [CI: 0.002–0.013]). Second, alongside the negative association between life satisfaction and migration intention, there is also a negative relationship between social trust and migration intention (–0.01 [CI: –0.01–(–0.003)]).

In the following section, we examine whether individuals intending to migrate to Austria possess different characteristics from those planning to move to other countries. To address this question, we reran the previously specified models with one key modification: the dependent variable indicates whether the respondent’s migration intention is directed toward Austria. Differences in socioeconomic variables are again presented based on the model that uses life satisfaction as the well-being indicator.

According to the model (Model 5), individuals residing in Central Hungary are less likely to plan migration to Austria than those from other regions. The average marginal effect is significantly higher in both the Great Plain and North (0.25 [CI: 0.11–0.39]) and Transdanubia (0.29 [CI: 0.15–0.43])

regions. Another notable finding is that individuals without child(ren) under the age of six are more likely to intend to migrate to Austria (0.17 [CI: 0.035–0.31]). Significant differences also emerge in subjective well-being variables. Higher life satisfaction is associated with a lower likelihood of migration to Austria (–0.04 [CI: –0.08– (–0.01)]). A similar negative association is found for optimism (Model 7), although it is only marginally significant ($p < 0.1$) (–0.02 [CI: –0.05–0.001]). When using happiness (Model 6) as the measure of subjective well-being, the pattern reverses once again: the happiest individuals (compared to those who report being happy none or little of the time) are more likely to intend to migrate to Austria, which is significant at the $p < 0.1$ level (0.22 [CI: –0.03–0.48]). After including social relationship variables (Model 8), three additional significant associations emerged. The likelihood of migration to Austria is negatively related to having infrequent contact with friends (–0.26 [CI: –0.46 to –0.05]) and positively related to having someone to discuss personal matters with (0.29 [CI: 0.04–0.53]). In summary, migration to Austria has specific characteristics related to geography, place of residence, and social connections, and the subjective well-being indicators associated with those who wish to migrate along these dimensions differ from those of those planning to migrate to other countries.

We also compared the migration-related intentions of individuals planning to migrate to Austria with those of individuals who indicated other destination countries. The strongest association was found for migration motivated by professional reasons. Respondents who selected this option—indicating that their migration is driven by a desire for more professional challenges and better career opportunities—were more likely to choose a country other than Austria ($\chi^2 = 11.28$, $p < 0.001$). A positive association was also observed between migration intention to Austria and the use of online information sources prior to migration ($\chi^2 = 5.47$, $p = 0.04$).

Next, we examined whether socioeconomic differences exist between those who selected Austria as their first-choice destination and those who listed it as their second or third choice (the latter two categories were combined). The sample size for this analysis was relatively small ($n = 151$). We found a significant relationship for only one variable (Model 9): individuals with previous migration experience were more likely to rank Austria as their top destination (0.28278 [CI: 0.1–0.465]). Subjective well-being also proved to be an important factor in this narrower comparison. Individuals who reported higher life satisfaction were less likely to rank Austria first among migration destinations (–0.0075 [CI: –0.12 to –0.02]). A similar negative association was observed for optimism (Model 10) (–0.038 [CI: –0.07 to

-0.003]), while no relationship was found between happiness level (Model 11) and the rank awarded to Austria as a destination.

Further disaggregating the category of those who selected Austria as their first-choice destination, we found that 53% did so without indicating any other country as a second or third choice. These individuals are referred to as those with a determined intention to migrate to Austria. Returning to the full sample, 123 respondents indicated only one migration destination, and 43% of them chose Austria. According to the models (Model 12), such individuals are characterized as being older (0.008 [CI: 0.001–0.01]), having medium (0.3553 [CI: 0.4636–0.6586]) or high educational attainment (0.6 [CI: 0.346–0.865]) compared to those with low education levels, being female (0.33 [CI: 0.16–0.5]), and being less likely to be students than employed persons (-0.55 [CI: -0.64 to -0.46]). In contrast to the trends observed so far, subjective well-being exhibits a different pattern. Although only significant at the $p < 0.1$ level, individuals with a determined intention to migrate to Austria report higher life satisfaction (0.05 [CI: -0.002–0.1]). This relationship becomes even more pronounced when subjective well-being is operationalized through happiness (Model 13). Compared to those who are happy none or little of the time, individuals who are happy most of the time (0.34 [CI: 0.032–0.65]) and happy all of the time (0.51 [CI: 0.15–0.88]) are significantly more likely to be among the group of determined Austria-bound migrants. No relationship was observed for optimism (Model 14).

10. How does migration affect subjective well-being in Austria?

10.1. Migration and subjective well-being

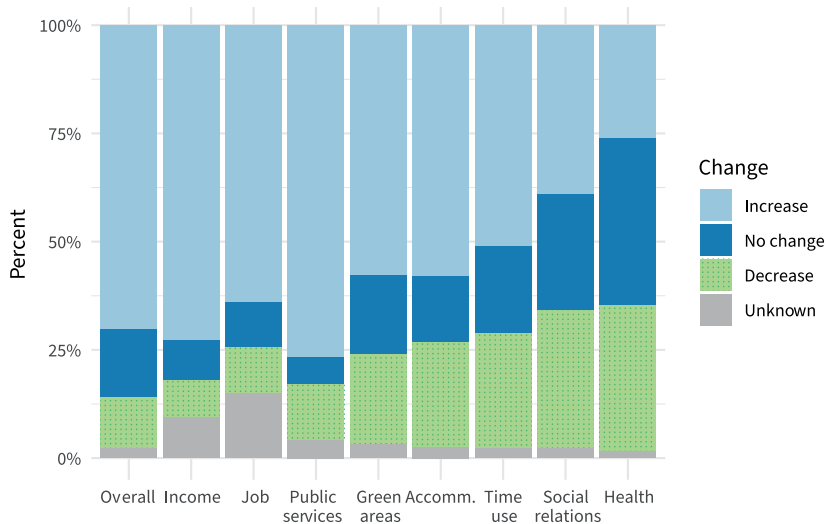
One of the central questions of the research was whether migration to Austria is beneficial for subjective well-being. Before addressing this question, it is necessary to reiterate a methodological limitation: the potential biases associated with retrospective assessments of subjective well-being. To support the robustness of our findings, this key question is also examined at the end of the chapter using a more advanced analytical method.

In this chapter, we first present in a descriptive manner (as a percentage of those who experienced an increase, and what the average increase was) the changes that occurred in the level of subjective well-being (invol-

ving comparing the current situation with the retrospective assessment before migration), examining evaluative, affective, and eudaimonic variables as well. We also analyse the correlations between these changes and compare the measured changes with individuals' own assessments of the success of their migration. After this, we model the change in subjective well-being (life satisfaction, several life domains, happiness, loneliness, optimism) using variables related to sociodemographic characteristics, transnational activities, and migration goals. Finally, we also depict the extent of the changes using a causal model.

Compared to the pre-migration period, 70.3% of respondents reported an increase in life satisfaction, while only 11.9% experienced a decline. Two specific domains showed particularly notable improvements: satisfaction with the quality of public services (76.6%) and income (72.9%). In contrast, the increase in satisfaction with social relationships (39%) and health status (26.1%) was considerably more modest. Regarding satisfaction with health, a large proportion (38.3%) reported no change, while in the domain of social relationships, a relatively large share (31.9%) reported deterioration. Perceptions of leisure time also showed a mixed pattern: 26.7% of respondents reported a decrease, while 50.9% reported an improvement.

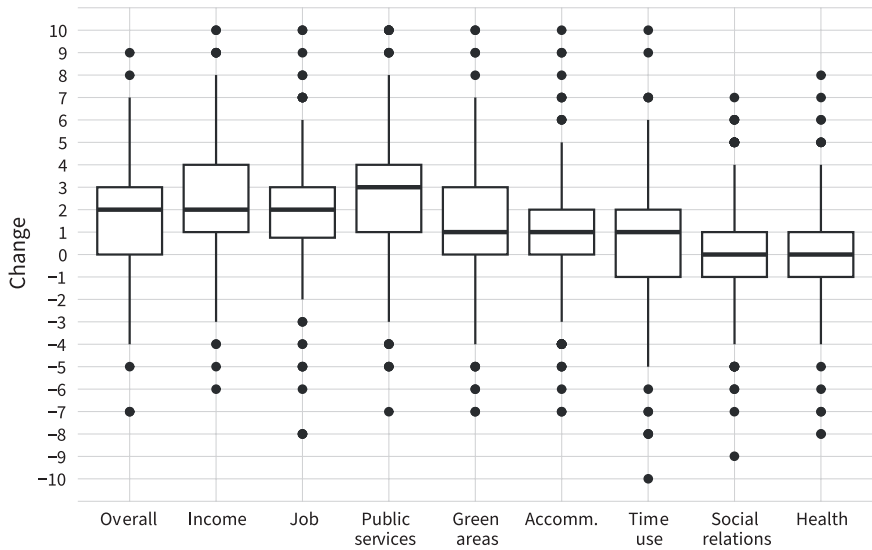
Figure 18. Changes in different domains of satisfaction (perception of current situation vs. current perception of pre-migration situation)



Source of data: MIGWELL survey among Hungarians living in Austria. Authors' figure.

For further analysis, the sample was restricted to those respondents for whom changes could be calculated across all examined domains, as well as in overall life satisfaction. Within this narrower subsample (N=249), only 2.7% of respondents reported no improvement in any domain, while 10.3% perceived positive effects of migration to Austria across all examined aspects of life. The largest group (17.9%) consisted of those who reported improvement in six to seven domains. Interestingly, although the proportion of respondents reporting increased satisfaction with public services and income was similar, the average degree of improvement was somewhat higher for public services (2.57) than for income (2.4). The average increase in overall life satisfaction amounted to 1.5 points. There was only one domain in which the average change was negative: satisfaction with health showed a minimal decline of -0.06.

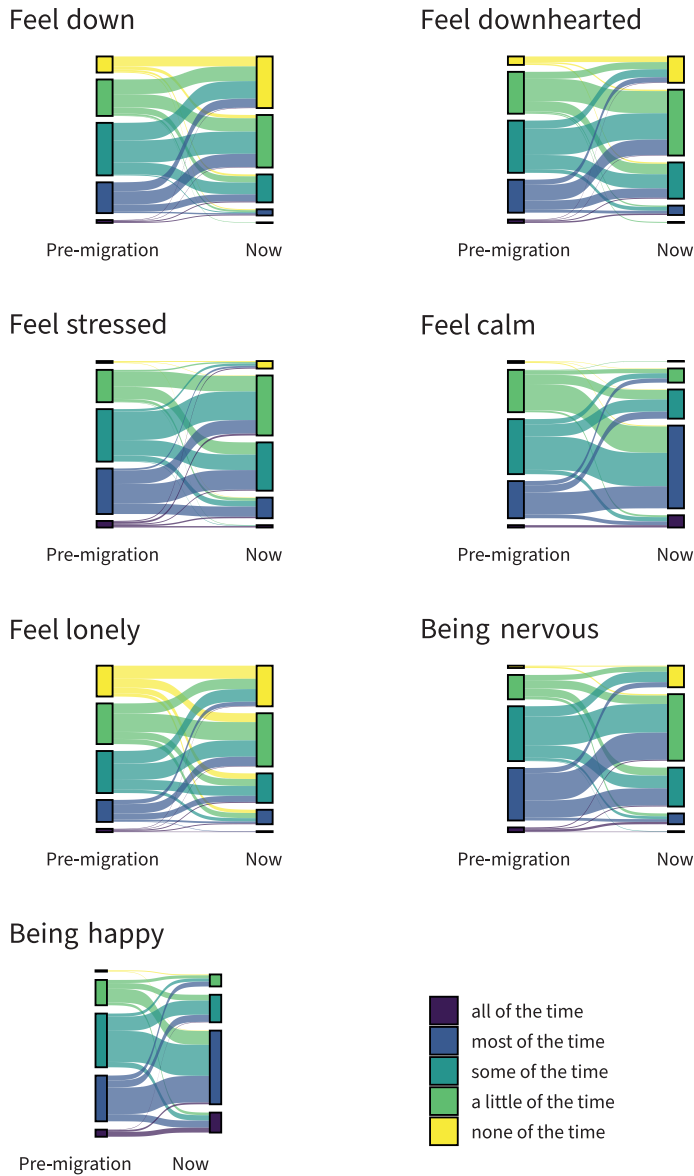
Figure 19. Changes in different domains of satisfaction (perception of current situation vs. current perception of pre-migration situation) (Boxplot – average values)



Source of data: MIGWELL survey among Hungarians living in Austria. Authors' figure.

Generally positive trends in emotional well-being were also observed. The share of respondents who reported not experiencing any negative emotions in the weeks before completing the survey increased—particularly regarding nervousness and feeling downhearted. More people also reported feeling these emotions “a little of the time,” while the share of “most of the time” responses, which were more common before migration, noticeably decreased. The data show that many respondents did not shift slightly toward improvement but often moved up by one or even two categories—for example, from feeling nervous “most of the time” before migration to only “some of the time” or even “a little of the time” afterwards. With feeling depressed, the improvement is especially striking: 29% of those who had felt depressed “most of the time” before migration reported feeling no depression at all after moving. Loneliness, however, changed less. Post-migration rates are quite similar to pre-migration ones. Among those who were “never” lonely before moving, 28% reported being lonely “a little of the time,” 18% “some of the time,” and 10% “most of the time” after migration. Still, positive developments occurred here as well—29% of people who used to feel lonely “most of the time” before migration said they had not felt lonely at all in the weeks before the survey. Positive emotions also improved. More than half of Hungarians living in Austria reported feeling happy or calm “all of the time” or “most of the time.” Notably, 57% of those who had felt happy only “some of the time” before migration now said they were happy “most of the time.”

Figure 20. Changes in the affective elements of subjective well-being (perception of current situation vs. current perception of pre-migration situation)



Source of data: MIGWELL survey among Hungarians living in Austria. Authors' figure.

A clear positive shift in measures of eudaimonic well-being also occurred—that is, deeper forms of fulfilment related to meaning, purpose, and autonomy—compared to the period before migration. Optimism increased among 59% of respondents, the sense that life has meaning rose for 60%, and the feeling of being free to live one's life as desired improved for 61.2%. The greatest share of respondents reporting a decline was seen in the “freedom to live” category, at 20%. For all three indicators, the median change is 1, suggesting that the degree of variation is quite similar across these aspects of well-being. In other words, the improvement is broad and balanced—no single aspect of eudaimonic well-being stands out as especially stronger or weaker than the others.

We examined how changes in different subjective well-being variables after migration relate to one another. A clear positive correlation was found between the change in life satisfaction and the change in optimism (Spearman's $\rho = 0.27$, $p\text{-value} < 0.001$). Among the affective variables, we analysed changes in happiness and loneliness. For both, three categories were created based on pre- and post-migration responses (decreasing frequency, unchanged frequency, increasing frequency). Both optimism (Kruskal–Wallis chi-squared = 46.99, $p\text{-value} < 0.001$) and life satisfaction (Kruskal–Wallis chi-squared = 45.785, $p\text{-value} < 0.001$) differed significantly across the happiness-change categories. When happiness increased, the average growth in life satisfaction was 2.14; for stable happiness, 1.23; and for decreasing happiness, only 0.18. For optimism, the corresponding three values were 1.6, 0.51, and 0.58, indicating that there was no difference between stable and decreasing happiness in this case. The same analysis was carried out for changes in loneliness, but no significant associations were observed. When loneliness decreased, the average change in life satisfaction was 1.83; when it remained stable, 1.82; and when loneliness increased, 0.88 (Kruskal–Wallis chi-squared = 16.395, $p\text{-value} = 0.3563$). For optimism, these same three values were 1.28, 1.23, and 0.24 (Kruskal–Wallis chi-squared = 19.014, $p\text{-value} = 0.3277$). However, there was a significant association between changes in happiness and loneliness ($\chi^2 = 40.163$, $p\text{-value} < 0.001$), suggesting an inverse relationship. Among those who experienced a decrease in happiness, 57.1% reported increased loneliness, while 53.2% of those whose happiness increased reported reduced loneliness. Among respondents whose happiness remained stable, 21.9% experienced a decrease in loneliness, 46.9% no change, and 31.2% an increase.

In the following, we describe how we modelled changes in these subjective well-being indicators according to socioeconomic characteristics, transnational activity, and the nature of migration. Each model included

a baseline level of subjective well-being, allowing us to determine which groups benefited most when starting from similar levels. In all models, pre-migration well-being was significant, with higher initial satisfaction associated with lower expected gains.

Among the evaluative well-being measures, we modelled overall life satisfaction, satisfaction with income, satisfaction with the quality of public services (the two domains showing the greatest improvement), satisfaction with social relationships (the domain with the highest deterioration rate), and satisfaction with health status (the domain with substantial stagnation). For overall life satisfaction (Model 15), older age (-0.02 [CI: -0.045 to -0.001]) and more recent migration (-0.02 [CI: -0.05–0.002]) were associated with fewer gains, with the latter being significant at the $p < 0.1$ level. This suggests that the positive subjective benefits of migration become even more pronounced over time. A difference by education level was observed: highly educated individuals, controlling for baseline levels, could expect significantly higher increases in subjective well-being than those with lower levels of education (1.85 [CI: 0.74–2.95]). No significant difference was found between medium and low education levels. However, overqualification for one's current job was associated with a smaller satisfaction gain (-0.6 [CI: -1.2 to -0.18]).

"After I left [Hungary], after a while, my partner came after me because he missed me. It was a huge break [change] for him, because he's a programmer, and at that time, he didn't trust his language skills. In the end, we both ended up working in hospitality as waiters. But he was constantly stressed about how he would get back to his own field [working as a programmer]." (30–34-year-old woman, social worker, Austria)

Migration purpose also had a relationship with outcome: those migrating for financial reasons exhibit greater gains than those who did not specify this reason (0.42 [CI: 0.013–0.83]). For financial migrants, the average estimated change was 1.75 (CI: 1.52–1.99), while for other migrants it was 1.33 (CI: 1.02–1.64).

The evolution of satisfaction with the financial situation (Model 16) is related to education level. A notable difference is that even having a secondary education provides a notable advantage (1.76 [CI: 0.62–2.9]). Highly educated individuals similarly enjoy an advantage over those with low levels of education (2.27 [CI: 1.07–3.47]), while the difference between

highly and medium-educated individuals is not significant. The negative effect of overqualification is also present in this model, with an average marginal effect similar to that observed for life satisfaction (-0.69 [CI: -1.16 to -0.21]). Students experienced lower income satisfaction gains than employed individuals (-1.32 [CI: -2.3 to -0.35]). Interestingly, the average marginal effects consistently point toward the reference category of poor health. Specifically, the difference between fair versus bad health is significant (-1.79 [CI: -3.33 to -0.261]).

Regarding satisfaction with the quality of public services (Model 17), aside from baseline values, only family structure shows a significant association. The models indicate that migrants living in Austria with their partner and child(ren) experience greater increases in satisfaction (0.7 [CI: 0.14–1.25]) than those with family members left behind in Hungary.

“And then, when my mom passed away, my wife came out [to Austria]. Well, from that point on, things have been good. Now it’s good. It’s really good now. You know, when I come home... well, when I come here [to the apartment in Austria], what do I have to do? I drink my coffee, take a shower, we sit down, have dinner, and that’s it.” (50–54-year-old man, house painter, Austria)

With satisfaction with social relationships (Model 18), the expected effect of transnational partnership and parenthood emerges. Individuals living in Austria with their nuclear family experience an increase of 0.84 points (CI: 0.22–1.45) compared with those who left their partner or child(ren) behind. An unexpected relationship appears with overqualification: overqualified individuals exhibit smaller gains in satisfaction with relationships (-0.87 [CI: -1.41 to -0.32]). The average estimated change for overqualified persons is also negative (-0.32 [CI: -0.76–0.118]), with the deviation from zero being significant. No significant associations were found regarding home visits or remittances.

“Or if someone has a university degree, they’re not [likely to be] working in a position that matches their qualifications. When you meet a community [people] like that, you can have what you could call a meaningful conversation – something that actually goes somewhere, with jokes and all that. But at other times, when you start any kind of conversation with another

group, it just stalls at a certain point. It starts to fall apart. And they tend to walk away. Usually, right around the moment they ask where you work. In the end, you don't even want to say what you do anymore..." (35–39-year-old man, post-doc researcher, Austria)

The change in satisfaction with health (Model 19) correlates with the subjective assessment of health as expected. Compared to those reporting poor health, all other categories exhibit significantly higher increases. For fair health, the average marginal effect is 1.37 (CI: 0.08–2.7), for good health 2.52 (CI: 1.22–3.82), and for very good health 3.39 (CI: 2.08–4.71), each compared to poor health. The positive association with living together with the nuclear family also appears here. Those living with their close family in Austria have an advantage over those with family members left behind (0.49 [CI: 0.02–0.97]). For individuals with family members left behind, the average estimate is negative (-0.35 [CI: -0.75–0.03]), significant at the $p < 0.1$ level.

"When you think that happiness means earning a lot of money, having a nice car, a big house, everything clean, beautiful, perfect... I was chasing that too. But then, when my illness came, I realized that none of it makes any sense at all!" (45–49-year-old woman, senior-care worker, Austria)

In the models for happiness (Model 20) and loneliness (Model 21), we similarly present variables related to positive change: for happiness, an increase; for loneliness, a decrease. The results of the happiness model show a different pattern than those of the life satisfaction model with respect to age and year of migration. Here, positive associations appear, with older individuals (0.0047 [CI: 0.0001–0.009]) and recent migrants (0.0019 [CI: 0.0014–0.0023]) slightly more likely to report increased happiness. Compared to employed individuals, inactive persons (-0.29 [CI: -0.31 to -0.26]) and students (-0.08 [CI: -0.1 to -0.06]) are less likely to experience an increase in happiness, with the disadvantage of inactive persons relative to students being clear (-0.2 [CI: -0.23 to -0.17]). In terms of education, having completed secondary education leads to a significant jump (0.23 [CI: 0.18–0.27] compared to primary education), while tertiary education, compared to secondary, does not yield a significantly higher likelihood of increased happiness. Overqualification affects not only changes in life satisfac-

tion but also the likelihood of increased happiness. Overqualified individuals have an 8.8 percentage point lower chance of experiencing happiness growth compared to those who are not overqualified (-0.08 [CI: -0.17 to -0.002]).

Among other variables, perceived health is associated with a prominent average marginal effect. Compared to those in poor health, having good (0.23 [CI: 0.17–0.29]) or very good (0.32 [CI: 0.26–0.38]) health is associated with a higher likelihood of increased happiness. Several transnational variables are also associated with happiness development. Individuals living in Austria with their nuclear family are more likely become happier than those living with their partner and/or child in Hungary (0.1 [CI: 0.04–0.16]). Sending money home is also associated with a higher likelihood of happiness growth (0.06 [CI: -0.004–0.12]), significant at $p < 0.1$. An even larger average marginal effect is observed among those who did not respond to the remittance question (0.07 [CI: 0.03–0.11]). Finally, our models show an inverse association with frequent home visits. Frequent visits, compared to rare visits, are associated with a smaller chance of happiness growth (-0.06 [CI: -0.13 to -0.008]), whereas not visiting at all predicts increased happiness compared to visiting rarely (0.047 [CI: 0.024–0.07]).

“Because it’s really not good – neither financially nor timewise – when, let’s say, I come home just for a long weekend. There’s no such thing as a long weekend here! You can go home, sure, but... no... I don’t think it’s a good idea. The trip alone takes a whole day.” (45–49-year-old woman, senior-care worker, Austria)

In the loneliness model (Model 21), a positive association emerges between the year of migration and the likelihood of increased loneliness: Recent migrants are more likely to experience loneliness (0.004 [CI: 0.003–0.005]), as it takes time to establish social connections in Austria. Inactive individuals are more likely to experience increased loneliness than employed persons (0.4 [CI: 0.35–0.44]), for whom colleagues and workplace socialization can facilitate integration and friendship formation. Regarding education, compared to those with low education, individuals with secondary (-0.04 [CI: -0.09–0.001]) and tertiary (-0.07 [CI: -0.11 to -0.03]) education are less likely to experience increased loneliness, with the first comparison significant at the $p < 0.1$ level. Overqualification is also negatively associated with this subjective well-being indicator; overqualified indivi-

duals have a 13.1 percentage-point higher likelihood of increased loneliness (0.13 [CI: 0.04–0.21]). Individuals in fair health are already less likely to experience increased loneliness than those in poor health (-0.32 [CI: -0.4 to -0.23]), and the average marginal effects are lower for good (-0.33 [CI: -0.39 to -0.27]) and very good (-0.4 [CI: -0.46 to -0.34]) health statuses. Transnational factors are again linked to multiple associations: living with one's nuclear family is linked to a lower likelihood of increased loneliness than having family members left in Hungary (-0.19 [CI: -0.26 to -0.13]). However, even compared to having family left behind, individuals with no partner or children at all are significantly more likely to experience increased loneliness (0.17 [CI: 0.1–0.23]).

“When it’s the high season and there are eighty-five thousand guests at the hotel, and you don’t even have time to think about your child sitting at home under the Christmas tree while you’re here working – then it’s a bit easier. But, for example, when I got stuck with Gerti (the elderly woman who had to be cared for) and the two of us spent Christmas together – well, that’s when the tears came... Even though we were on Messenger constantly, talking for hours [with family back home], it just wasn’t the same... I went through three Christmases like that. Last Christmas, we were home, here in this living room, with the Christmas tree – and that’s when the tears came again, because for years I didn’t really have Christmas, or even a Christmas tree, since Gerti said she was allergic to the smell of pine and didn’t want one. I didn’t miss it then, because I was working day and night. I didn’t even want one, because for me, having a Christmas tree by myself wouldn’t mean anything. After all, what does the Christmas tree represent? Love. But where was the love? Seven hundred kilometers away... And then last year, the tears came again – but this time because the kids were here, and my partner, the one I love, was here too”
(45–49-year-old woman, senior-care worker, Austria)

Regarding changes in optimism (Model 22), a $p < 0.1$ significant relationship appears with higher education. Compared to those with basic education, highly educated individuals can expect greater increases in optimism (1.24 [CI: -0.22–2.7]). Among the variables that were previously strongly positively associated, health status and family structure also play a role. Compared to those in poor health, individuals in good (1.89 [CI: 0.12–3.65]) and very good (2.17 [CI: 0.39–3.94]) health can expect greater

increases in optimism. Finally, living with one's nuclear family provides an average marginal advantage of 0.63 (CI: 0.04–1.21) compared to leaving family behind.

During the survey, we also asked respondents how they assessed the success of their own migration. According to 70% of them, moving to Austria met their expectations and fulfilled their earlier plans and hopes. However, complete satisfaction was less common: 26.1% reported being fully satisfied, while a larger group—43.9%—reported being mostly satisfied. Another 23.2% gave a mixed or ambivalent response, suggesting that their experience included both positives and negatives. Only a small minority, 4.5%, reported feeling disappointed with their decision to migrate.

“So this is how it happened – as I mentioned, my brother and I started this together. In the end, he was the one who was more into it [who really wanted to work in Austria]. I mean, until I was 42, I had never even crossed the border, so I wasn’t too eager about it. Well, it ended up with him saying after three months that he’d had enough... He thought that we’d come to Austria, wouldn’t have to work too hard, and would quickly fill our pockets – get rich fast. But he soon realized that here you have to work [here] too, and it’s not at all the way he imagined!” (50–54-year-old man, house painter, Austria)

We also examined how this self-reported assessment relates to the previously analysed changes in subjective well-being. The results indicate that perceived success in migration is associated differently with various well-being dimensions. Changes in health status (Kruskal-Wallis chi-squared: 9.26, p-value: 0.9), changes in optimism (Kruskal-Wallis chi-squared: 17.7, p-value: 0.47), and, surprisingly, changes in income satisfaction (Kruskal-Wallis chi-squared: 10.9, p-value: 0.81) as well as changes in happiness (χ^2 : 4.99, p-value: 0.54) show no relationship with perceived success. The average change in income satisfaction (4.15) is actually highest among those who felt their migration did not meet expectations, whereas for those who were completely satisfied with their migration, the average change is 2.73.

For life satisfaction (Kruskal-Wallis chi-squared: 23.52, p-value: 0.07) and satisfaction with public services (Kruskal-Wallis chi-squared: 26.25, p-value: 0.05), significant associations can be detected at the $p < 0.1$ level. For life satisfaction, the average change across categories decreases as expected (1.83, 1.6,

1.19, and 0.78). The strongest relationships with the perception of migration success were observed for changes in satisfaction with social relationships (Kruskal-Wallis chi-squared: 28.72, p-value: 0.01) and changes in loneliness (χ^2 : 35.03, p-value: <0.001). The average change in satisfaction with social relationships is negative for mixed evaluations (-0.186), -0.92 for non-respondents, 0.4 for “largely lived up to,” and 0.59 for “completely lived up to.” The association with changes in loneliness is striking as well. Among those who considered their migration unsuccessful, 83.3% reported an increase in loneliness. For mixed evaluations, 44.4% reported increased loneliness, for “largely lived up to” 24.8%, and for “completely lived up to” only 13.6%.

In addition to the previous models, we conducted a causal analysis to examine the impact of migration to Austria on different dimensions of subjective well-being, focusing on the most recent emigrants (2018–2022) and controlling for selection bias. The results show clear positive effects of migration on life satisfaction and happiness. When control variables and their interactions were included, the average treatment effect in the remaining matched sample (ATM) for life satisfaction (Model 23) was 0.57, corresponding to an approximate 8.8% increase attributable to migration. Regarding happiness (Model 24), migration reduced the likelihood of reporting “little or none of the time” or “some of the time” and increased the probability of reporting “most of the time”; the ATM was 0.24. According to the model, 64% of migrants reported being happy “most of the time” compared to 40.3% in the absence of migration. No significant ATM was observed for the meaningful life model (Model 25).

Most moderating effects were not statistically significant, with significant results ($p < 0.05$) only for satisfaction with income and satisfaction with social relationships. Regarding income, those with median satisfaction experienced greater gains in life satisfaction (Model 26) from migration than those with maximal satisfaction. A similar pattern was observed for social relationship satisfaction: median satisfaction was advantageous relative to maximum satisfaction, which appeared to be disadvantageous. The ATM for “most of the time” happiness (Model 27) was 0.20, and for life satisfaction, 0.56; the latter was significant at $p < 0.1$. For life satisfaction, median satisfaction with social relationships also represented a disadvantage compared to the minimum, $p < 0.1$. Regarding health satisfaction, those with median satisfaction experienced greater gains in happiness than those who were maximally satisfied. Gender also moderated the effects: men experienced a larger increase in life satisfaction (ATM = 0.96) than women (ATM = 0.24), with this effect significant at $p < 0.1$.

10.2. Transnational ties and migration challenges

Hungarians residing in Austria exhibit exceptionally high levels of transnational activity. Although EU regulations require individuals to maintain an official residence in only one country at a time, 62.6% of the Hungarians in the sample still have a registered address in Hungary. However, only 20.7% actually have a household there, meaning that nearly half of all respondents (45.2%) have kept their official Hungarian address even though they no longer maintain a household in the country. The data also show that Hungarians living in Austria have largely maintained their social connections with people “back home.” Only 15.2% reported having no friends in Hungary (and another 6.5% did not answer this question). Interestingly, those without friends in Hungary tended to have emigrated earlier—the median year of emigration for this group is 2010—while those with at least ten friends back home typically left much later, with a median emigration year of 2019. Geography appears to play a role as well.

Only 38.3% of those without friends in Hungary live in the three provinces closest to the border (Upper Austria, Vienna, and Burgenland), whereas 80% of those with at least ten friends live in these areas. Most respondents (35.5%) reported still having two to four friends in Hungary.

When it comes to practical connections, two-thirds (66.8%) of respondents said they can rely on material support from Hungary, while about half (49.7%) can count on non-material help such as emotional or informational support. Visiting patterns also reveal ongoing ties to the homeland. The most common frequency of travelling home is once or twice per year (32.6%), but travelling back two or three times annually, or even monthly, is also common (both 21%).

“If someone is attached to two places, I don’t think you can really say which one is the centre of their life. I don’t think that can really be defined in such a case. I can’t say that one feels more like home and the other less so. Maybe we could just say that I have two homes.” (35–39-year-old woman, childhood educator)

“And when I go home [to Hungary] and have one or two of those experiences, then I find myself thinking, ‘Wow, I’m so glad I don’t live here.’ I can’t name a specific example right now, but there’s always something.

That feeling of – ‘thank God I don’t live in Hungary!’ (40–44-year-old man, food-service worker, Austria)

“The other thing is, when we go back to Hungary – and this has happened more than once with my daughter – everyone there is so rude, so grumpy, people just walk around like that on the streets. We look around like, ‘What’s going on here?’ And then the shop assistant is rude to us, too. So once my daughter started grumbling, and I told her, ‘Oh, we’re in Hungary – sorry...’” (50–54-year-old woman, childcare worker, Austria)

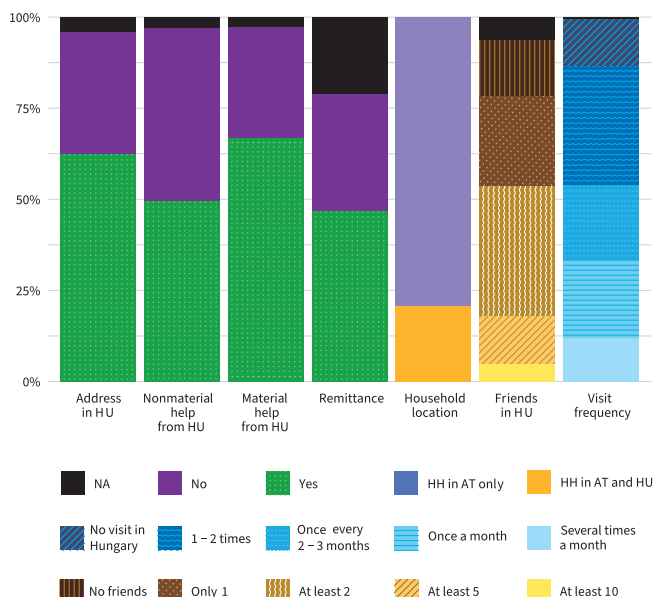
At the extremes, similar shares of respondents reported either visiting several times a month (11.9%) or not visiting at all (12.9%). While such visits can be draining and sometimes trigger family tensions or stress, many also report that they are emotionally enriching. Several interviewees said that even short trips to Hungary had reinforced their decision to migrate, due to negative experiences with public services, politics, and everyday interactions.

Nearly half of the respondents (46.8%) send financial support home, while about one-third (32.3%) do not. The share of people who did not answer this question (21%) is notably high. Further analysis suggests that non-respondents resemble those who do send money home, suggesting that some may have chosen not to disclose this information openly. Based on a logistic regression model (Model 29), the probability of sending money to Hungary is higher if the reason for migration was to solidify a future later in Hungary (+34.4% [CI: 0.28-0.41]). There is a strong association between the frequency of home visits and remittances. In contrast to no return home at all, both infrequent (+29.5% [CI: 0.96-0.49]) and frequent (+32.5% [CI: 0.12-0.53]) return home are associated with a higher propensity to remit. People who moved to Austria between 2011 and 2020 are more likely to send money home (35.2% [CI: 0.13-0.57]) than emigrants before 2004, the reference group. In terms of education, those with vocational education are less likely to send money home (-25.3% [CI: -0.01 to -0.43]) than those with a low level of qualifications. Also, we observed lower odds of sending money home for the other education groups, but the differences were not significant. Those without children are more likely to remit than those living in Austria with children (+23.8% [CI: 0.095-0.38]). However, the presence of a left-behind partner or a child is not associated with sending money home.

"But the thing is, we talked on Messenger every day, and she [daughter] knew exactly that no matter what happened, her mom was always there behind her [supporting her]... Even if I couldn't hug her, I was still there, behind her. But of course, it was hard for her! She'd wake up in the morning, go to bed at night, and I wasn't there during the day – but still, I was always there behind her. And, of course, you can't buy those things with money... You can't make up for the absences with money. The hugs, the kisses..." (45–49-year-old woman, senior-care worker, Austria)

Among those who provide financial support to family or friends remaining in Hungary, the median amount sent home equals about 10% of their income. There is no significant gender difference in this proportion. An examination of respondents' monthly income (converted from categorical to numerical values using category midpoints) alongside the share of remittances indicates that Hungarians in Austria send home an average of roughly €330 per month. Differentiated by gender, men remit about €380, while women send around €288.

Figure 21. Transnational activities and ties to Hungary of Hungarians living in Austria



Source of data: MIGWELL survey among Hungarians living in Austria. Authors' figure.

We also modelled the “exact” amount of remittances using linear regression (Model 30). The variable with the largest average marginal effect is the existence of a transnational partner. Having a partner in Hungary is associated, on average, with a €257 [CI: 43-471] higher monthly remittance. Even those without a partner send home more than those living with a partner in Austria (+€120 [CI: -15-256]). The remittance rate also increases with higher income. For every additional €100 in income, the average remittance increases by €10.8 [CI: 0.2-19.3].

About 22.6% of the total sample have a partner or child who does not currently live with them, indicating that they left behind close family members in Hungary. Some variation exists—for instance, a partner might live in a third country (such as Germany) or in another Austrian household, and in a few cases, the child living outside Austria may already be an adult. A smaller group, 4.1% of respondents, reported having both a partner and at least one child, neither of whom lives in the same Austrian household.

In examining the political dimensions of transnationalism, we also compared the level of trust in Austrian and Hungarian institutions. A clear majority expresses greater trust in Austrian institutions than in their Hungarian counterparts: 78.1% trust the Austrian media more, and 77.4% have greater confidence in the Austrian government. Only 8% of respondents expressed higher trust in the Hungarian government, highlighting a strong shift in institutional trust toward Austria.

“For me, my peace of mind at home [in Hungary] began [improved] when I started blocking news sites or redirecting them into an RSS channel where I could filter out certain words. So things like ‘killed,’ ‘executed,’ ‘raped,’ ‘Minister X embezzled’ – I just don’t see those anymore. And since then, I’ve had peace of mind. The kind of information I see or hear greatly influences how I feel.” (35–39-year-old man, post-doc researcher, Austria)

10.3. Overqualification

Within our sample, restricted to employed Hungarians in Austria, 25% reported being overqualified for their current job. Turning to the characteristics of the overqualified, 68.2% are women; however, only 36.5% hold a higher education degree. The largest proportion (63.5%) of the overqualified have completed at most the secondary level of education.

“I think most people make the mistake of waiting too long. We also have a lot of acquaintances who have wanted to make a change for years and get into their own field, but for some reason, they never do it, even though they could. I don’t even understand it. For example, I had an acquaintance who was a social pedagogue, and at the company where I worked, I arranged a practical placement for them, too, but they didn’t take the step. Honestly, I know very few people who actually work in a position that matches their qualifications.” (30–34-year-old woman, social worker, Austria)

Our model, which treated overqualification as the dependent variable (Model 31), confirmed the association between gender and overqualification. Based on the average marginal effect, women have a 14.6% [CI: 0.007–0.285] higher likelihood of being overqualified regarding their current Austrian employment. The differences between tertiary and secondary education and between age groups, however, were not found to be significant.

Considering the ISCO-08 categories, employment in the Elementary Occupations sector (with Technicians and Associate Professionals as the reference category) is associated with a significantly higher probability of overqualification (0.59 [CI: 0.28–0.89]), while those employed in the Professionals category exhibit a significantly lower likelihood of this (-0.2 [CI: -0.35 to -0.05]).

A modest geographical pattern is also evident. The probability of overqualification among Hungarians working in Burgenland is significantly higher than among those working in Vienna, the reference category (0.51 [CI: 0.3–0.72]). Following Burgenland (68.5%), the largest average marginal effects are observed in Tyrol (39.6%) and Carinthia (38.4%). Overqualification is also associated with settlement type: it is more likely to occur among those living in densely populated areas than in sparsely populated ones (0.23 [CI: 0.06–0.4]). Even in moderately populated areas, a relationship significant at the $p < 0.1$ level is observable (0.11 [CI: -0.007–0.23]).

Migration motivation also plays a role. Those who migrated for financial reasons do not exhibit a significantly higher probability of overqualification, whereas migrants who moved to Austria to establish a better future in Hungary do. The average marginal effect in this case is 0.24 (CI: 0.07–0.41).

We also examined the extent to which overqualification is associated with the income of Hungarians residing in Austria (Model 32). Even after controlling for gender, education, economic sector, and other vari-

ables, we found that overqualified individuals earn €307 less per month (CI: 29–585). The actual income disadvantage of overqualification is likely to be much greater, as the proportion of overqualified workers is higher in sectors where the estimated average income is also lower (Elementary Occupations: €1,877). However, no significant relationship can be identified between overqualification and the difficulty of covering monthly expenses ($\chi^2 = 5.24$, $p = 0.27$).

In the previous chapter, we established that negative associations can be observed between overqualification and changes in certain indicators of subjective well-being since the onset of migration. One further important, and as yet unanalysed, domain related to overqualification is job satisfaction (dependent variable). Based on the model results (Model 33), even after controlling for income (the income variable itself does not show a significant association), job satisfaction is considerably lower among overqualified individuals. The average marginal effect is -1.33 (CI: -1.9 to -0.77).

But does overqualification itself relate to the perceived success of migration? According to the data, mixed evaluations of migration (31.48%) and perceptions of failure (9.25%) are somewhat more common among overqualified Hungarians in Austria compared to their non-overqualified counterparts (21.08% and 4.21%, respectively). However, the relationship between the two variables is not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 6.08$, $p\text{-value} = 0.1$).

As previously presented, it is concerning that a high proportion of Hungarians planning to migrate abroad would be willing to accept jobs for which they are overqualified. Among those planning to move to Austria, this share is slightly higher, at 60.15%, though the relationship is not significant ($\chi^2 = 1.54$, $p\text{-value} = 0.21$). Among those who listed Austria as their primary destination, the proportion increases slightly again to 61.6%. Among individuals who named Austria as their sole destination, 60.37% would be willing to accept employment for which they are overqualified.

Regarding German proficiency among Hungarians living in Austria, 1.3% do not speak German at all, 10% at a basic level, 28.7% at a conversational level, 35.8% at an advanced level, and 24.2% at a native level. For analytical purposes, the categories of “does not speak” and “basic level” were combined to create a new “lowest proficiency” category.

“I really, really suffered through that first period, I have to say. So without at least a basic knowledge of the language, I would never come out [migrate] again. You’re so helpless – I can’t even describe what that feeling was like. When people are talking and you don’t understand... and no matter

how much you want to help, to do what you're supposed to do... you just can't." (60–64-year-old woman, cleaner, Austria)

Women (Model 34) are less likely to belong to this lowest proficiency category (-0.06 [CI: -0.08 to -0.04]), as are those with secondary (-0.29 [CI: -0.33 to -0.25]) or tertiary education (-0.34 [CI: -0.39 to -0.29]). In terms of economic status, inactive individuals are more likely (0.25 [CI: 0.22–0.28]), while students are less likely (-0.07 [CI: -0.09 to -0.04]) to have low German proficiency compared to employed persons. A positive association with overqualification also appears: individuals who are overqualified are more likely to have low German proficiency (0.036 [CI: 0.02–0.05]). Across settlement types, those living in densely populated areas are less likely to have low language proficiency compared to residents of sparsely populated areas (-0.016 [CI: -0.02 to -0.008]), whereas individuals living in moderately populated areas are actually more likely to have low proficiency (0.088 [CI: 0.06–0.1]). According to model estimates, the probability of low proficiency is 12.63% in moderately populated areas and only 2.15% in densely populated areas. Significant regional variation is also evident across Austrian federal states (with Vienna as the reference point). The strongest associations with low German proficiency were obtained in Vorarlberg (22% [CI: 16–28]), Upper Austria (16% [CI: 11–20]), and Lower Austria (10% [CI: 6–13]).

The probability of low German proficiency is also higher among those who have left family members behind in Hungary (as opposed to those whose immediate family also lives in Austria). The average marginal effect is 0.04 [CI: 0.027–0.05]. Furthermore, recent migrants and those who migrated for non-financial reasons are more likely to speak German only at a basic level. Regarding years since migration, each additional year of later arrival is associated with a minimal average marginal effect of 0.0006 (CI: 0.0002–0.0004), while migration for financial reasons—compared to migration without such a motive—is associated with an average marginal effect of -0.018 (CI: -0.03–0.007).

For native-level German proficiency (Model 35), no significant differences are observed by gender or overqualification status. However, the relationship with education remains significant: compared to individuals with primary education, those with secondary (0.13 [CI: 0.07–0.19]) and tertiary education (0.36 [CI: 0.26–0.46]) are more likely to possess native-level German proficiency. With respect to age, a disadvantage is observed among older individuals (each additional year is associated with -0.008 [CI:

-0.13 to -0.003]). In terms of economic activity, the trend is the opposite of that observed for basic-level German proficiency. Inactive individuals are less likely to have German language proficiency than employed persons (-0.21 [CI: -0.25 to -0.16]), while students are more likely to be proficient than employed individuals (0.098 [CI: 0.005–0.19]). Across settlement types, in moderately populated areas, not only is the share of basic-level speakers higher, but also the proportion of native-level speakers (0.155 [CI: 0.08–0.23]) compared to sparsely populated areas. Among Austrian federal states, native-level German proficiency is most prevalent in Vienna (36% [CI: 29–42]), Styria (23.1% [CI: 11–35]), and Salzburg (19.9% [CI: 9–30]) according to the model's average predictions. The picture is nuanced by the fact that 17.8% of Vienna-based respondents reported living in moderately populated neighbourhoods—areas that typically correspond to higher socioeconomic status within the city. One additional significant relationship appears in the model: recent migrants are less likely to have native-level proficiency in German (-0.02 [CI: -0.023 to -0.017]).

Both the success of social integration and the frequency of social interactions with Austrians show a clear association with German language proficiency. First, respondents with higher proficiency levels report meeting their friends more frequently ($\chi^2 = 21.18$, p-value: 0.002). Among those with native-level proficiency, 90.7% confirmed this, while in the combined category of the two lowest proficiency levels (“does not speak” and “basic level”), only 60.6% did so. Individuals with higher language proficiency also report participating more often in leisure activities ($\chi^2: 40.38$, p-value < 0.001): 88% of those with native-level German engage in such activities, compared to only 36.4% among those with at most basic proficiency. They are also more likely to be members of civil organizations (excluding Hungarian cultural associations): 44.4% of native-level speakers are members, compared to just 6.06% among those with at most basic proficiency ($\chi^2: 21.55$, p-value < 0.001).

“But after a while, I noticed that people who have been there longer – not just for a week or a month – will talk to anyone. For example, with all my neighbours, it got to the point where they would wave to me from afar. In fact, when I went back home, there were some who messaged me on Messenger asking where I was, what had happened to me, because they hadn’t seen me for weeks. There are some I still keep in touch with even today. We write to each other – ‘What’s new with you?’ or ‘How are you doing?’ So that’s how close it got. But of course, for that to happen, it’s

not just the locals who need to be open and welcoming – the person who’s being welcomed also has to behave that way!” (45–49-year-old woman, senior-care worker, Austria)

A significant relationship also emerges regarding the partner’s nationality (χ^2 : 31.175, p -value < 0.001). Among respondents with a partner, 52.8% of those with native-level proficiency have an Austrian one, compared to 26.2% among those with advanced proficiency, 9.5% among those at the conversational level, and 10.5% among those with at most basic proficiency. These findings make it unsurprising that German language proficiency is also associated with perceptions of social exclusion (χ^2 : 72.45, p -value < 0.001). Among native-level speakers, only 1.3% reported experiencing exclusion, 13.5% responded “so-so,” 20.3% “rather not,” and 64.9% “not at all.” For those with basic-level proficiency, the corresponding proportions were 21.2%, 45.5%, 15.2%, and 18.2%, respectively.

“So I don’t have a single acquaintance here, or even an Austrian colleague [that I’m not on good terms with]... Well, okay, half of them are only Austrian on paper, because they’re actually Turkish or whatever. But honestly, I don’t have bad contact [relations] with anyone. I usually say that if someone can integrate here even just a little bit, then there’s no problem.” (50–54-year-old man, house painter, Austria)

A further question arises: is the level of German proficiency associated with changes in subjective well-being since migration? To examine this, the models presented in the previous chapter were extended to include the variable representing German proficiency. In the life satisfaction model (Model 36), average marginal effects consistently point toward higher well-being with better language skills, though no statistically significant relationship was observed. In the happiness improvement model (Model 37), however, the average marginal effect between native-level and at most basic-level German proficiency is significant (0.08 [CI: 0.005–0.15]), indicating a higher likelihood of increased happiness with better language skills. This positive difference also appears in the optimism change model (Model 38): compared to the reference group with at most basic proficiency, those with native-level German show an increase of 1.16 (0.02–2.3) units.

Finally, German language proficiency also correlates with respondents' self-assessed success of migration (χ^2 : 23.65, p-value: 0.005). Among those with native-level proficiency, 39.4% rated their migration as completely successful, compared to 24.1% among those with advanced proficiency, 21.3% among those with conversational proficiency, and 22.9% among those with at most basic proficiency.

11. Considering return

About 9.4% of Hungarians living in Austria plan to return to Hungary within the next three years, while another 11% either do not know yet or chose not to answer. Among those considering a return, 30.9% are still in the early stages of contemplation, 27.7% are seriously considering it, another 27.7% have already made the decision, and 13.8% have taken concrete steps toward moving back. In addition to potential returnees, 6.8% of respondents plan to move again within the next two years—but not to Hungary, rather to a third country.

“But recently I found a very appealing job posting [in Hungary], and I even sent them a CV. I didn’t mention it to anyone. Because, well... if we look at the background and we’re talking about happiness and feelings, I would still be happy if I could work peacefully at home [in Hungary].” (50–54-year-old man, waiter, Austria)

The vast majority, 80.2%, stated clearly that they have no intention of leaving Austria in the near future. The most common motivation for returning to Hungary was related to social ties—family, friends, and community—mentioned by 75.9% of those considering moving back. Achieving the initial goals that motivated migration in the first place was cited by 20.7%, while 17.2% mentioned other, less common reasons. Notably, none of the respondents said they were returning because they had difficulty adapting to life in Austria. For those choosing to stay in Austria, the leading reason was financial stability (67.2%). Many also stated a desire for a more predictable future (52.6%) and better working conditions (40.5%) as major factors, while one in five (20.2%) mentioned maintaining social relationships as part of their decision to remain.

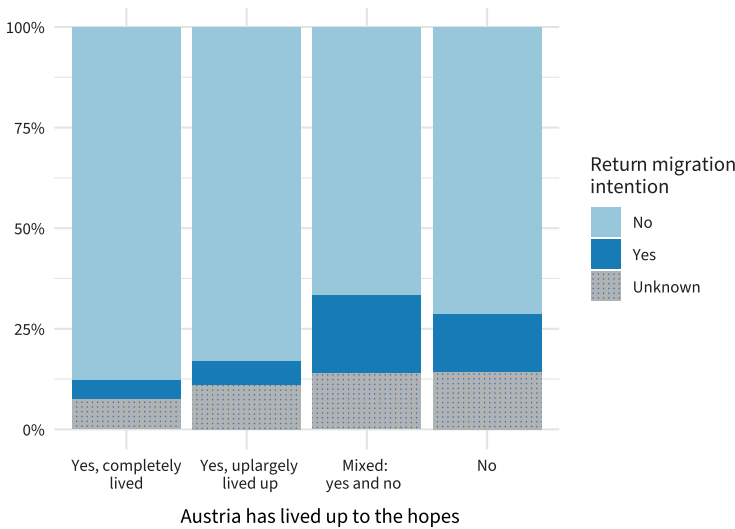
The intention to return was first modelled using basic socioeconomic variables and variables related to transnational activity (Model 39). The results indicate that older migrants are more likely to plan to return (an additional year increases the likelihood by 0.0058 [CI: 0.001–0.01]). Less likelihood of return is less expected among the inactive population compared to the employed reference group (-0.102 [CI: -0.14 to -0.07]). Other significant variables are associated with transnational activities and the purpose of migration. As expected, those whose migration decision involved the aim of establishing a future in Hungary are more likely to return than those without such motivation (0.18 [CI: 0.021–0.35]). The probability of return is also higher among frequent visitors to Hungary. Compared to those who never visit Hungary, the average marginal effect is 0.143 (CI: 0.05–0.23), while relative to those who visit rarely, it is 0.105 (0.02–0.2). Consistent with expectations, individuals with family members left behind in Hungary are more likely to return than those with immediate family living with them in Austria (0.134 [CI: 0.02–0.24]). No significant associations were found with German language proficiency or overqualification.

Subsequently, variables that capture subjective well-being were incorporated into the models, and new iterations were run. These suggest that a positive change in subjective well-being is associated with a lower likelihood of return migration. The average marginal effect for changes in life satisfaction (Model 40) is (-0.02 [CI: -0.03 to -0.006]), for satisfaction with the quality of public services (Model 42) (-0.01 [CI: -0.02 to -0.003]), and for satisfaction with social relationships (Model 43) (-0.02 [CI: -0.03 to -0.006]). A similar relationship is observed for eudaimonic well-being (Model 47): an increase of one unit in optimism is associated with a lower likelihood of returning (-0.02 [CI: -0.03 to -0.005]). Conversely, an increase in loneliness (Model 46)—as opposed to a decrease—shows an average marginal effect of 0.2—in other words, plus 20% (CI: 0.06–0.347), indicating a substantial rise in the probability of return. No significant associations were found for changes in happiness (Model 46), satisfaction with income (Model 41), or satisfaction with health status (Model 44).

Finally, a clear relationship can be identified between individuals' self-assessed success in migration and their intention to return ($\chi^2 = 14.3$, p -value = 0.002). Among those intending to return, 14.3% considered their migration completely successful, 28.6% mostly successful, 50% mixed, and 7.1% unsuccessful. Among those not intending to return within the next three years, these proportions are 29.3%, 46.7%, 19.8%, and 4.2%, respectively.

“I’m Hungarian – this [Austria] isn’t my homeland! I have my own country. But, as we’ve been talking about – the stable, predictable future and all that – I’ve been here [in Austria] for too long to just step away from it easily. I usually say it’s a double-edged sword. After a while, you want to go, but you also want to stay. Because, of course, your heart always pulls you home! My big house is back there, I’m Hungarian, that’s my home – Austria is not my home.” (50–54-year-old man, house painter, Austria)

Figure 22. Intentions to return to Hungary and assessment of migration success



Source of data: MIGWELL survey among Hungarians living in Austria. Authors’ figure.

12. Summary

12.1. Scope and approach

MIGWELL investigated the Hungary–Austria migration nexus through the lens of subjective well-being (SWB). In this project, we proposed a research design that may be suitable (with some limitations) for capturing the two-way relationship between the two concepts: the impact of subjec-

tive well-being on migration intention and the effect of migration on subjective well-being. SWB was treated as an umbrella concept comprising hedonic components (cognitive life evaluation and affect) and eudaimonic components (e.g. meaning, autonomy, competence).

The MIGWELL project applied a mixed-methods design, combining secondary analyses (migration and socio-economic data, EU-SILC, a Hungarian microcensus) with primary data collection, including quantitative surveys (Hungary: representative N=1,000; an additional N=375 with migration intentions; Austria: snowball N=310 Hungarian migrants) and qualitative methods. The empirical fieldwork consisted of successive steps of different types of data collection, with each step following the sequence listed below. All stages were designed with a clearly defined objective and sought to broaden the horizon of the research, building always on the experience of the previous one: (a) secondary data analysis, (b) narrative interviews with actual and potential migrants or stayers, (c) focus groups with stakeholders and experts, (d) cognitive interviews with actual and potential migrants or stayers, (e) surveys in Hungary and Austria, (f) primary data analysis, (g) policy maker and expert interviews, and (h) roundtable discussion with policy makers, stakeholders and experts.

The key results are summarised below in line with the logic of the project's original objectives: (1) Austria–Hungary well-being gap; (2) SWB à migration nexus; (3) migration à SWB nexus.

12.2. Austria–Hungary well-being gap

Hungarians in Austria

Since Austria's full labour-market opening to Hungary in 2011, the population stock of Hungarians in Austria has expanded markedly; by 2024, it exceeded 100,000, making it the sixth-largest foreign-born group in Austria. Recent years show rising circularity: in 2024, for every 100 departures from Hungary to Austria, 67 individuals returned, suggesting fluid, transnational mobility rather than one-way settlement. Destination areas are also shifting: while Vienna, Lower Austria, and Burgenland have historically dominated, the western provinces (e.g., Tyrol, Salzburg) are increasingly attracting migrants, often to smaller towns or villages, and to hospitality jobs.

Objective living conditions

According to EU-SILC, Austria outperforms Hungary across multiple objective quality-of-life dimensions: higher wages, lower relative deprivation, reduced social exclusion, better health outcomes, greater access to leisure activities, and so forth. Despite the narrowing gap, material disparities remain large: in 2022, average incomes in Austria were 2.3 times those in Hungary (PPP-adjusted). At the same time, migrants from post-2004 EU accession countries earned only about 70% of the average income of native Austrians.

Across most indicators, the material living standards of Hungarian migrants in Austria tend to fall between the Hungarian and Austrian averages. In some domains, however, migrants reach parity with – or even exceed – the Austrian benchmark (e.g., capability-based measures such as the ability to afford annual holidays). However, they are disadvantaged in specific domains, most prominently perceived social exclusion, where they fare worse than both Austrians and Hungarians in Hungary.

Life satisfaction

Overall life satisfaction in Hungary has increased steadily since 2013. According to the 2024 MIGWELL data, Hungarian migrants in Austria report a mean life satisfaction of 7.4 (on a scale of 0–10), positioned between Austria's 7.9 (2022) and Hungary's 7.0 (2024). A similar “intermediate” profile appears across most domains of satisfaction. Two contrasts stand out:

- Income satisfaction is higher among Hungarians in Austria than the Austrian average, suggesting that migrants evaluate their income favourably.
- Migrants report less satisfaction than Hungarians in Hungary in the areas of housing, social relationships, and work-life balance, pointing to the psychosocial costs and time pressures of transnational mobility and integration.

Affective and eudaimonic SWB

Hungarians in Austria reported more frequent positive emotions (happiness, calmness) and more frequent negative emotions (stress, loneliness) than Hungarians in Hungary. This striking duality suggests that gains in opportunity and livelihood security may coexist with strain and uncertainty. In terms of eudaimonic well-being, migrants show clearer advantages, especially in optimism, indicating stronger forward-looking eva-

valuations and perceived possibilities. This may reflect both improved institutional environments (e.g., public services) and the narrative of “having moved to improve life”, which can reinforce future orientation.

Transnationalism as a structural condition of well-being

Geographic proximity supports persistent cross-border lives. Over half visit Hungary four to five times per year, and nearly half send remittances home. Many of them “never fully leave” Hungary nor fully “arrive” in Austria – they live in a transnational social field which protects identity and family bonds while also producing logistical and emotional burdens that shape SWB.

12.3. Effect of SWB on migration intentions in Hungary

Migration intention: volume and motivations

MIGWELL operationalised migration intentions in three tiers (ever thought about moving, would like to live, or plan to move abroad within two years), focusing mostly on the last one – the most behaviourally proximate indicator. In the nationally representative MIGWELL sample, 8.3% planned to emigrate within two years – close to the level observed in the 2016 Micro-census. Yet only 14% of planners reported a firm decision, indicating substantial ambivalence and potential sensitivity to changing conditions.

On the one hand, motivations are overwhelmingly economic and work-related (financial reasons: 83%; “investing in future at home”: 29% – these individuals perceiving migration as a strategy for improving long-term prospects in Hungary). Most of the potential emigrants envision spending two to five years abroad, but 28% would consider permanent emigration. Austria is the leading destination, followed by Germany, the UK, and the Netherlands. Emigration is primarily labour-related: 99% cite work; 7% cite study. Having social support is common: only 38% would go alone; family/friends often encourage the move.

Socio-demographic patterns

Similar to the international patterns, potential emigrants in Hungary are more likely to be young, male, healthy, highly educated, employed, and urban, with substantial migration-related social capital: ca. 15% have lived abroad previously, and more than 80% report relatives or friends abroad.

However, the potential migrants are not disproportionately the poorest; they cluster in the middle-income range. This suggests migration intention may be driven less by absolute income or wealth and more by constrained prospects and aspirations among groups with enough resources to move.

SWB gradients among potential migrants

Cognitive SWB differences between our analytical subgroups are modest but systematic. For instance, potential emigrants report an overall life satisfaction of 6.9, compared with 7.2 among stayers. Dissatisfaction is most pronounced in time use and income satisfaction. Health is the only domain in which potential emigrants show slightly higher satisfaction, consistent with the “healthy migrant” phenomenon and reflecting their younger age. Affective and eudaimonic patterns diverge: those with emigration intentions display more favourable affective outcomes (both positive and negative affect reported more favourably than among stayers), while eudaimonic scores are lower.

SWB as a driver of migration intention

Lower life satisfaction is associated with greater migration intention. Crucially, SWB also appears to be associated with destination choice: those planning to migrate specifically to Austria exhibit significantly lower satisfaction than those targeting other countries. This suggests that Austria’s proximity may make it a “feasible exit”, particularly for those in more acute dissatisfaction. In contrast, more distant destinations may be selected by individuals with different profiles (e.g., more resources, different aspirations).

12.4. Effects of migration on SWB in Austria

Methods

To estimate how migration affects well-being, MIGWELL combines retrospective pre-migration evaluations (subject to recall and self-justification biases, especially among long-term migrants) with causal models to assess changes in overall and domain life satisfaction, as well as affective and eudaimonic variables.

Overall life satisfaction

Taking all things together, MIGWELL results converge on a positive effect: nearly 70% of survey respondents reported improved life satisfaction, 18% reported no change, and 12% reported a decline. On average, retrospective evaluations suggest a +1.5-point gain on a 0 to 10 scale, while causal modelling yields a smaller but still meaningful +0.57 gain. Compared with earlier studies, these values are lower, suggesting that SWB gains from the migration process across the former Iron Curtain may be declining over time.

Domain-specific changes

The most robust improvements tend to occur in satisfaction with one's own income and with public services. By contrast, satisfaction with health, social relationships, and time use improved for fewer than half of all respondents. Social ties are a critical fault line: 32% reported weakened social relationships after migration. Nonetheless, many migrants experience broad-based gains: nearly 40% reported improvements in 6-7 of 9 domains; 11% improved in all 9 domains; and only 3% reported no improvement in any domain.

Affective and eudaimonic well-being

Retrospectively, affective well-being scores improved markedly: the share of people feeling “mostly/always down” fell from 23% to 5%, while those “mostly/always happy” rose from 38% to 70%. However, in the causal models limited to migrants who had moved within the last decade, these affective differences are not statistically significant – highlighting the sensitivity of affect estimates to design and cohort selection. Loneliness is the exception, where improvements are rarely visible. Family separation intensifies vulnerability: among those who were never lonely pre-migration, half became “mostly lonely” afterward. Nearly 60% reported improved optimism, averaging +1 point on a 0-10 scale.

Migration outcomes and return intentions

Most respondents feel migration met completely or mostly their hopes and expectations (70%). At the same time, 23% have mixed opinions, and 4.5% report disappointment.

Nearly ten percent (9.4%) plan to return within three years, though only about half have concrete plans. Social ties were the most commonly cited reason for return (76%), followed by the sense that initial goals had already been met (the “target earners”). In general, return planners have lower current life satisfaction (6.5) than those who want to stay in Austria, and even lower than potential migrants in Hungary. A key selection insight is the persistence of dissatisfaction: a 1-point drop in pre-migration satisfaction predicts a 3% higher probability of returning, suggesting that low SWB can be both a cause of migration and a predictor of less stable settlement trajectories.

Importantly, return is not synonymous with failure. “Target earners” who plan to return still show large life satisfaction gains (+2.2), exceeding those of those who plan to stay in Austria. Conversely, those migrating for relationship reasons show smaller gains (+0.4), consistent with “trailing partner” vulnerabilities.

Main challenges

Based on survey data and the experience of the narrative interviews, four main barriers emerge as systematic constraints to increasing SWB:

Overqualification. At least every fourth Hungarians are overqualified in Austria. Women are 14.6% more likely than men to work below their qualification level. experience that. Overqualification is indirectly tied to overall life satisfaction through the correlation with lower income expectations, lower job satisfaction, higher level of stress, and a higher risk of reporting unmet expectations.

Language barriers: 11% reported only having basic German (likely an underestimate). Among potential migrants planning to move to Austria, 68% report a maximum of basic German, including 27% who have none. Knowledge of the host society’s language is strongly linked to inclusion: fluent speakers are more likely to feel included in Austrian society. Having at least conversational proficiency in German is associated with a stronger sense of inclusion in Austrian society and a lower intention to return.

Discrimination/exclusion: While explicit discrimination is rarely reported, interviews indicate a persistent “foreigner” status even among those with fluent German, revealing limits to full belonging. Perceived exclusion is especially consequential: among migrants, its negative association with life satisfaction is four times stronger than in Hungary.

Transnational ties: Visits and remittances sustain family life but impose burdens. Forty-seven percent of migrants provide financial/emo-

tional support. Remittances decline with longer Austrian residence and with children co-resident in Austria. Notably, remitting correlates with higher work satisfaction, suggesting moral meaning or perceived purpose may buffer work strain. However, separation is a major stressor: 23% of respondents have left behind a partner or child; those with a partner in Hungary are less likely to report an increase in happiness.

Concluding synthesis

Across the Hungary–Austria migration nexus, MIGWELL documents a large structural well-being gap rooted in material and institutional differences. In Hungary, lower life satisfaction (especially income dissatisfaction) contributes to migration intentions, while resources (health, networks, foreign-language knowledge) enable mobility. After migration, life satisfaction increases, with very strong domain gains in income and public, but negative outcomes in social relations and loneliness for specific groups, particularly those experiencing exclusion or family separation. The transnational “lifestyle” imply that migration is frequently not a permanent rupture but a bi-local life strategy, with well-being shaped by how migrants manage integration demands and cross-border commitments.

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Whereas a vast amount of literature examines migration through the lens of material living conditions, the subjective evaluation of these has received less attention. The MIGWELL joint research project addresses how migration and well-being are linked in Hungary and Austria and interprets their relationship within a unified research framework. The central concept of subjective well-being was explored across its evaluative, affective, and eudaimonic dimensions using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods.

This book presents the project's main findings based on analyses of relevant international, Austrian, and Hungarian statistical databases, as well as original surveys conducted in 2023 and 2024. It explores key questions such as: How does subjective well-being influence migration intentions among the Hungarian population? How does migration affect the subjective well-being of Hungarians after they move to Austria? Does their perception of their well-being improve in line with their material gains, or fail to reach the expected level?

Bringing together evidence from both sending and receiving contexts, the book offers new insights into the complex interplay between migration and well-being.

