From west to east within the EU: the patterns of Dutch lifestyle migration to Hungary

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While scholarly attention to international human mobility often centres on labour or economic migration from the global south to the global north or from Eastern to Western Europe, there is a growing recognition of lifestyle migration as an important phenomenon. Research on lifestyle migration has traditionally focused on privileged and affluent individuals, particularly those relocating to sunny destinations, such as the Mediterranean regions of Southern Europe. However, emerging evidence suggests that individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds are increasingly participating in lifestyle migration and that new destinations are becoming relevant.

This study addresses this research gap by examining an unconventional form of European lifestyle migration: the movement of Dutch citizens to Hungary. Through an analysis of demographic, social, and geographical characteristics, this study explores the distinct features and evolving patterns of Dutch migration to Hungary over the past 2 decades, comparing these migrants to other immigrant groups and the native Hungarian population.

The findings reveal that Dutch lifestyle migration to Hungary has increased, with migrants tending to be older, more reliant on public benefits, and experiencing higher unemployment rates than both the native population and other foreign groups in Hungary. Furthermore, the Dutch population in Hungary has lower level of education than other foreign groups. Socially and demographically, Dutch citizens in Hungary share similarities with other Western European migrants, such as Belgians, Germans, and Austrians. However, their geographical distributions differ: while Austrians cluster

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near their borders and Germans and Belgians settle in tourist towns around Lake Balaton, Dutch migrants are concentrated in disadvantaged rural villages in Southern Transdanubia, particularly in Baranya County, where property prices and living costs are significantly lower.
These findings demonstrate the changing dynamics of lifestyle migration, with less affluent groups increasingly participating and selecting destinations beyond traditionally favoured, more expensive regions. This study advocates for a broader understanding of lifestyle migration, challenging the conventional assumption that economic considerations are insignificant. Moreover, the observation that lifestyle migrants are not always as affluent as commonly presumed and are increasingly settling in small villages within disadvantaged regions raises important questions for policymakers in Hungary and other countries.

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Introduction

Although human migration is as old as humanity itself, international migration has increased significantly in recent decades. Although the primary trajectory of migration remains from low- to high-income countries, scholars have noted that migration patterns have become increasingly complex. This complexity arises from the growing diversification of origins and destinations, as well as a broader range of motivations and socio-economic backgrounds among migrants. Among these evolving patterns, lifestyle migration – a form of human mobility – has gained prominence. Lifestyle migration typically refers to the relocation of individuals not necessarily for economic reasons but in pursuit of a better quality of life.

Existing research on lifestyle migration often centres on North America, examining movements from Canada or northern U.S. states to southern regions, or within Europe, particularly from northern to southern countries. Migrants are often portrayed as affluent and privileged. This study seeks to expand the concept of lifestyle migration by examining a less conventional stream: the migration of Dutch citizens to Hungary. Using quantitative research methods, we construct a comprehensive profile of Dutch citizens residing in Hungary and compare their characteristics with those of other population groups in the country, including all

foreign nationals, Hungarian citizens, and EU-13 nationals (citizens of EU-15 countries, excluding the Netherlands and the UK).

This paper begins with a literature review that contextualises Western European migration to Hungary. This review provides an overview of Hungary's recent migration history, an analysis of the demographic and geographical patterns of migrants, and a focus on migration from the Netherlands.

Following the literature review, this study outlines the data sources, their limitations, and the methodology employed for the quantitative research. The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. First, it examines the scale and trends of Dutch migration to Hungary, using various data sources and indicators. Second, it analyses the social and demographic characteristics of the Dutch population in Hungary, tracking their evolution over time and comparing them with other population groups. Finally, it investigates the geographical distribution of Dutch citizens in Hungary, comparing it to other groups while exploring the social and demographic variations associated with different settlement locations.

By providing a detailed comparison, this study aims to deepen our understanding of Dutch migration to Hungary within the broader framework of European and global migration trends. It highlights the increasing fluidity and complexity of human migration, challenging traditional perceptions of lifestyle migration. This research partially addresses a research gap: firstly, it moves beyond the typical north-to-south movement to sunny, conventional tourist destinations, and secondly, it broadens the profile of lifestyle migrants to include individuals beyond the affluent and privileged.

The findings also contribute to policy discussions in both sending and receiving countries. For receiving regions, this study raises questions about regional development, rural revitalization, gentrification, and potential cultural degradation. For sending countries, it prompts considerations regarding the sustainability of domestic welfare systems. In doing so, this study seeks to enrich academic discourse on lifestyle migration while offering practical insights for policymakers grappling with the challenges and opportunities posed by this phenomenon.

Migration to Hungary

Although the Carpathian Basin is not generally considered a major receiving region in global migration (Dövényi et al. 2021), its central location between Europe and Asia and the historical fluidity of its borders, have contributed to significant human migration to Hungary. The country has alternated between periods dominated by immigration and others characterised by prominent emigration (Dövényi–Tóth 2008).

After the end of state socialism, Hungary became an important transit country for people moving westward and experienced a migration surplus for the first time since the end of World War II (Hárs 2009, Juhász 1995). The easing of travel and migration

regulations, along with economic convergence in the former Eastern Bloc, encouraged many ethnic Hungarians from neighbouring countries, mainly Romania, to migrate to Hungary. Furthermore, the Yugoslav War of the 1990s caused an influx of immigrants (Juhász 1995), and some non-European migrants took advantage of the political–economic changes and liberal legislation in the years following the regime change (Nyíri 2003). By 1993, 123,000 foreign citizens were living in Hungary, a significant increase from approximately 12,000 in 1980 (Dövényi et al. 2021).

In the early 2000s, Hungary began aligning its migration policies with EU standards. Following its accession to the European Union in 2004 and the introduction of new laws facilitating long-term residency easier for EEA citizens, the number of foreign citizens immigrating to Hungary increased, as shown in Figure 1. Another notable influx involved Hungarian citizens returning to Hungary, particularly those who had emigrated following EU accession (Gödri 2018). Additionally, this period marked the beginning of a diversification in the countries of origins of migrants. At the turn of the century, 70% immigrants came from four neighbouring countries (Gödri 2018). By 2019, this proportion had declined to one-third (Dövényi et al. 2021). On the one hand, Hungary experienced an influx of migrants from older EU member states, particularly Germany, which by 2011 had become the second most significant country of origin for migration to Hungary (Dövényi et al. 2021). On the other hand, Hungary also began attracting an increasing number of non-European immigrants (Kincses 2020). The proportion of migrants from Europe countries declined from 89% in 1995 to 66% in 2020, and by 2020, 175,000 foreign citizens were registered in Hungary (Dövényi et al. 2021).

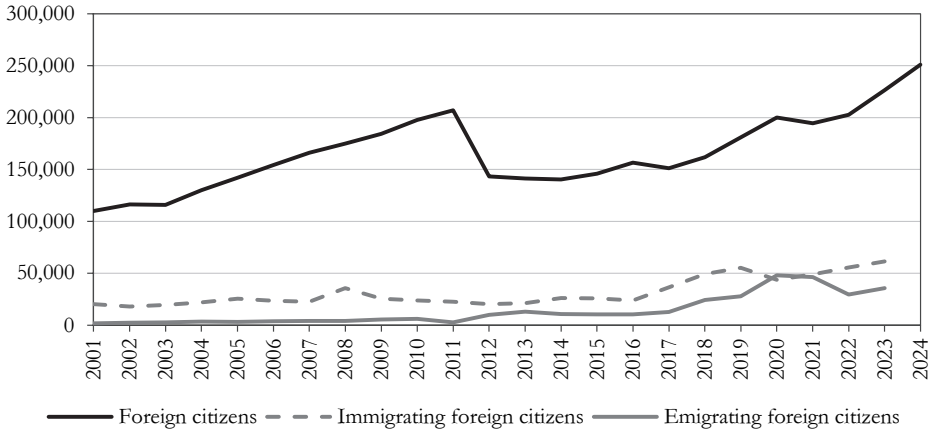
The amendment to the Citizen Act in 2011 made it easier for foreign-born Hungarians to obtain Hungarian citizenship through a simplified naturalisation process. Consequently, the number of foreign citizens in the country declined sharply after 2011 (Figure 1). After 2012, the number of foreign citizens initially remained relatively stable before increasing, except for a slight drop in 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. When analysing the annual immigration and emigration figures for foreign citizens in Hungary, it is evident that both numbers remained relatively stable, except for a slight increase in immigration numbers in 2008. This increase is likely attributable to the European debt crisis, which negatively affected the economic and social stability of many middle-class 'baby boomers', prompting them to migrate to lower-cost countries both within and beyond the European Union (Bender et al. 2018, Hayes 2021, Iorio 2020). Between 2016 and 2019, the number of foreign citizens in Hungary rose significantly, with both immigration and emigration doubling, most likely due to the growing influx of Ukrainian citizens (Dövényi et al. 2021).

From 2001 to 2020, the number of foreign citizens migrating to Hungary consistently exceeded those leaving. However, in 2020, during the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic, more foreign citizens left Hungary than arrived. A slight decline in the foreign citizen population was recorded in 2021, as the data were collected on

1 January of that year. Following this decrease, immigration rebounded in 2022, surpassing the previous peak of 55,514 foreign immigrants recorded in 2019. As of 1 January 2024, 250,912 foreign citizens were registered in Hungary (KSH 2024).

Figure 1

Number of foreign citizens in Hungary on January 1 (2001–2024) and number of immigrating and emigrating foreign citizens in Hungary (2001–2023)*



* Foreign citizens residing in Hungary (stock) are those foreign citizens who reside in the country on 1 January of a given year with a valid residence or settlement permit. Flows data of immigrating foreign citizens is based on registrations of establishing a residence (for EEA citizens), or the issuing of residence permits (third-country nationals). Flows data of emigrating foreign citizens is based on the expiration, revocation or non-renewal of the residence permit.

Source: own processing based on KSH, 2024.

In 2018, while immigration levels and the proportion of foreign immigrating citizens in Hungary's population were low compared with Western European countries, they were relatively high compared with other Central and Eastern European countries. The crude immigration rate, defined as the number of immigrant foreign citizens per year per 1,000 inhabitants, in Hungary ranged from 2‰ to 2.6‰ between 2008 and 2016. By contrast, this rate exceeded 11‰ in traditional host countries such as Switzerland, Sweden, Austria, and Germany in 2016. Countries such as Belgium, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Spain had a rate of approximately 7‰, whereas in most Central and Eastern European countries – except for Poland and the Czech Republic – the absolute number of immigrants was lower than that in Hungary in 2016. Moreover, only Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, and Estonia had a crude immigration rate higher than Hungary's in the region (Gödri 2018).

Despite peaks in immigration and return migration, Hungary's population declined by 7% between 1990 and 2020 (Kocsis 2021). The most recent census

recorded a further population decrease of 3.36% between 2011 and 2022 (KSH 2022). On the one hand, the country has experienced a natural population decline since 1985 (Kocsis et al. 2021a), and on the other hand, it has seen net migration losses (Kocsis 2021). At the same time, the country's population is ageing (Kocsis et al. 2021b).

Geographic and demographic patterns of migration to Hungary

Immigration to Hungary has grown increasingly complex over the past few decades, paralleled to the changes in immigrant demographics. While the gender ratio of immigrating foreign citizens was relatively balanced in 2000, a male surplus of 56 to 59% emerged between 2002 and 2016 (Gödri 2018). According to the most recent census, 54% of foreign citizens in Hungary were male (KSH 2022). The foreign-born population had a higher average level of education and a higher rate of employment than the native population. In 2019, three-quarters of Hungarian residents and approximately 80% of foreign citizens were employed (Dövényi et al. 2021). Furthermore, the average age of the foreign population was 38.8 years in 2020, whereas the average age of the Hungarian population was 41.7 years (Dövényi et al. 2021). More recently, an increasing number of older adults from the EU-15 countries, mainly women from Austria, Germany, and the Netherlands, have migrated to Hungary (Kincses 2020).

Nearly half of all foreign citizens and one-third of those born abroad reside in Budapest, whereas only 17.4% of the Hungarian population lives there. This results in a highly centralized distribution of foreign citizens in the capital, where one out of ten residents was born abroad (Dövényi et al. 2021). Economically active and highly qualified foreign citizens particularly prefer Budapest, and this preference increases with distance from their country of origin (Bálint et al. 2017). Consequently, most non-European immigrants reside in Budapest (Dövényi et al. 2021). For example, 90% of Asian immigrants have settled in Budapest (Gödri 2018). Central Hungary is the preferred destination for Romanian immigrants, while migrants from other neighbouring countries tend to settle in border regions adjacent to their home countries (Dövényi et al. 2021, Gödri 2018). Additionally, Lake Balaton attracts many retired migrants, drawn by greater pension purchasing power, recreational opportunities, and natural surroundings (Bálint et al. 2017, Kincses 2015, 2020). The migration of elderly individuals to Hungary has increased significantly since the 2000s (Dövényi et al. 2021). This pattern aligns with the concept of international retirement migration (IRM) as defined by Gustafson (2001) or, more broadly, lifestyle migration, which is further explored in this study.

A recent study by Koós et al. (2024) examined Hungary's role as a significant destination for international elderly migration, with a particular emphasis on German retirees, the largest group among these migrants. Their findings highlight that these individuals are not only present in typical tourist areas such as Lake Balaton but that

a significant proportion also seek rural areas, often in economically disadvantaged regions.

In addition to Budapest and the Lake Balaton area, the Southern Great Plain and, since 2008, Southern and Western Transdanubia have attracted an increasing number of immigrants. Meanwhile, the economically disadvantaged region of Northern Hungary remains less attractive (Gödri 2018). Although foreign citizens are relatively concentrated, particularly in major cities and certain regions, they were present in 85% of Hungary's municipalities by 2019 (Dövényi et al. 2021).

Hungary presents a compelling case for studying lifestyle migration, as it is an emerging phenomenon that remains largely underexplored. While significant academic and political attention has focused on migration from former socialist states in Central and Eastern Europe to Western Europe, far less is known about migration in the opposite direction. Hungary stands out in this region as it receives more immigrants than its regional counterparts, making it particularly intriguing to investigate.

Moreover, previous studies demonstrated that lifestyle migration influences the national distribution of immigrants, with areas such as Lake Balaton attracting a higher proportion of lifestyle migrants. However, it is worth examining whether newer groups of lifestyle migrants, such as the Dutch, exhibit similar geographical patterns. Understanding these dynamics can provide valuable insights into their impact on Hungary and potentially on other comparable countries worldwide.

Lifestyle migration and retirement migration

For a long time, migrants were viewed as rational, utility-maximizing individuals who based their migration decisions solely on cost-benefit analyses. Traditional neoclassical economic models explain migration primarily as a result of wage disparities between countries (Sjaastad 1962). However, over the past few decades, scholars have increasingly recognised that migration is far more complex, involving a multifaceted decision-making process influenced by a wide range of factors (Helms–Leblang 2019). In light of the mobilities turn, recent scholarly work has focused on the fluidity between travel and migration, challenging the rigid distinctions between "here and there" or between tourism and migration. This shift acknowledges the complex and multifaceted nature of human mobility (Cohen et al. 2013).

Since the mid-2000s, researchers have observed the growth of a previously underexplored migratory trend – the movement of relatively affluent, predominantly white individuals from the Global North to the Global South (Emard–Nelson 2021). This form of migration is not primarily driven by economic necessity but rather by a desire to access specific amenities that are either unavailable or unaffordable in migrants' home countries, such as recreational spaces, tropical environments, and leisure-oriented lifestyles (McGarrigle 2022). Nyíri–Xiang (2022) emphasised the

growing importance of values in migration, encompassing ideologies, desires, and lifestyle choices. For example, a recent news article reported that an increasing number of German retirees have migrated to Hungary, citing high taxes, rising living costs, and increasing immigration in their home country as primary reasons (Than 2024).

The terminology surrounding this type of migration is often unclear, as different scholars use various terms depending on their focus, including 'lifestyle migration', 'amenity migration', 'retirement migration', 'privileged migration', 'residential tourism', 'expat migration', 'international counter urbanisation' (Emard–Nelson 2021, Huete–Mantecón 2011). In this paper, the term 'lifestyle migration' will be primarily used, as it appears to be the most widely accepted term and is the most relevant for analysing migration from the Netherlands to Hungary. Furthermore, I use the term 'international retirement migration', which is considered a subset of lifestyle migration occurring after or just before retirement age, enabled by increased life expectancy and personal wealth in the 'modern life course' of the Global North (Kapteyn et al. 2005).

Traditional migration research typically focuses on economic push-and-pull factors and opportunities, whereas lifestyle migration is driven by cultural, environmental, and social motivation, such as a desire for a slower-paced lifestyles, better weather, natural beauty, or cultural heritage. Migrants in this context are often "pushed" by dissatisfaction with societal values or lifestyles in their home countries. General theoretical frameworks attempt to unravel the structural aspects of migration, whereas the lifestyle migration framework emphasises individual agency and choice. Furthermore, this approach frames migration as an ongoing process tied to identity formation rather than a one-off event (Benson–O'Reilly 2016).

Rather than rejecting traditional migration frameworks, the lifestyle migration perspective expands them, moving beyond economic or political drivers to highlight the multifaceted nature of migration. It emphasises the interplay between material and symbolic factors, offering insights into migration streams that do not align with conventional migration theories. This approach broadens our understanding of the complexity and diversity of contemporary migration trends.

Lifestyle migrants differ from other migrants seeking a better quality of life in that they can easily relocate due to their relative privilege, often stemming from citizenship and economic, social, or cultural capital (McGarrigle 2022). Benson–O'Reilly (2009) describe lifestyle migrants as typically privileged, yet recent research has identified an increasing presence of economically vulnerable individuals within this group (Botterill 2016, Iorio 2020, King et al. 2021, Repetti et al. 2018, Toyota 2022).

Benson–O'Reilly (2009) identified three types of lifestyle migrants based on their destinations: (1) residential tourists – individuals who move to coastal resorts or sunny islands; (2) rural idyll seekers – migrants who relocate to rural areas in search of a simpler, nostalgic lifestyle; and (3) bourgeois bohemians – those who seek alternative lifestyles that reflect artistic, spiritual, or creative values. While the first group is the

most well-known, research shows that the geographies of international retirement and lifestyle migration are becoming increasingly diverse (King et al. 2021, Ormond–Toyota 2016).

Lifestyle migration has grown significantly in Europe since the 2008 financial crisis. The austerity measures that followed the crisis negatively affected many middle-class 'baby boomers', prompting them to relocate to more affordable, economically peripheral countries both within and outside the European Union, using their accumulated wealth (Bender et al. 2018, Hayes 2021, Iorio 2020, McGarrigle 2022).

Not only have the factors driving migration proven more complex than those suggested by neoclassical models, but the temporal aspect of migration is also more complicated than generally assumed. While migration has traditionally been viewed as the permanent relocation of an individual from one country to another, it is often more fluid. Migration does not always need to be permanent and can be temporary or repeated. For instance, in lifestyle migration, circular migration, where individuals move back and forth between their home and host countries, or long-term migration followed by an eventual return, are common patterns (Dumont–Spielvogel 2008).

Given Hungary's peripheral economic position in Europe, Western Europeans, including Dutch citizens, are unlikely to be motivated by higher income or better job opportunities. Instead, they are likely motivated by the pursuit of different lifestyles. Therefore, we hypothesise that Dutch citizens migrating to Hungary are lifestyle migrants. This hypothesis is explored further in the following sections, which examine the migration of Dutch citizens and empirical data in this paper.

Migration from the Netherlands

To better understand Dutch citizens who choose to migrate to Hungary, it is useful to review the literature on Dutch migration, both in English and Dutch. Since the early 2000s, scholars have sought to understand the increasing emigration from the Netherlands and other high-income countries (van Dalen–Henkens 2008, van Dalen–Henkens 2007). It became evident that economic approaches to migration were insufficient, as factors such as age, education, income, and social networks play crucial roles in the decision to emigrate (van Dalen–Henkens 2007). Moreover, research on Dutch emigration has highlighted dissatisfaction with the public domain in the Netherlands as a significant factor (van Dalen–Henkens 2013). The dominant push factors for Dutch emigrants include high population density, crime, and a lack of tranquillity and space. Immigrants often seek safe countries with lower population densities, suggesting that emigration from high-income countries such as the Netherlands is primarily driven by a desire to enhance quality of life rather than economic gain (Ter Bekke et al. 2005).

Hungary's lower population density and abundant space appeal to the lifestyle preferences of potential Dutch immigrants. Furthermore, ideological aspect may also

play a role. Increasing immigration to the Netherlands, combined with challenges in integration and growing socio-economic issues, has led some to believe that the Dutch government is failing to adequately support its highly educated, autochthonous population, prompting them to seek opportunities abroad (Ter Bekke et al. 2005).

Although the Netherlands is typically regarded as an immigration country, emigration remains significant. Research conducted in 2005 found that 2% of Dutch citizens expressed a desire to emigrate, though only one-tenth had concrete plans. Nearly 90% migrated to countries they had previously visited, highlighting the connection between tourism and migration. The majority of potential migrants in 2005 were aged 35–44, with a smaller proportion aged 65 years or older. They were generally well-educated, high-income individuals, who often migrated with their partners and children (Ter Bekke et al. 2005). However, more recent literature indicates that international retirement migration is a growing phenomenon among Dutch citizens (Henkens et al. 2022, Savaş et al. 2024, Spaan et al. 2022). The number of retired migrants has increased since the early 2000s (van Dalen–Henkens 2008), with approximately 24,000 registered Dutch pensioners living abroad by 2021 (Henkens et al. 2022).

The average Dutch retirement migrant left at 62 years of age, with migration peaking at 65. Interestingly, over one-third of these migrants left before reaching official retirement age, indicating that many migrated before receiving a full pension. Approximately two-thirds of Dutch retired migrants were male. If they had a family, they typically migrated with their partners, leaving their children behind (Spaan et al. 2022). A 2024 survey found that Dutch retirement migrants were more likely to be adventurous and postmaterialist, and to identify with the countercultures of the 1960s. It also found that the greater the social ties retirees had in the Netherlands, the less likely they were to emigrate (Savaş et al. 2024).

Hungary is an increasingly popular destination for Dutch IRM, ranking as the eighth most popular destination for Dutch citizens over 65 (Savaş et al. 2024). While migration motivations vary, 88% of retired Dutch migrants in Hungary cited the low cost of living as a factor (Spaan et al. 2022).

In conclusion, Hungary and other Central and Eastern European countries have become significant destinations for Western European immigrants. However, research on European migration to these countries remains limited. Based on the literature on immigration to Hungary and Dutch emigration, it can be inferred that Dutch immigrants in Hungary are likely to be older, more educated, and less active in the job market than the general immigrant population. In addition, we expect a concentration of Dutch citizens in Budapest and Lake Balaton. Since most Dutch migrants are lifestyle migrants seeking quieter locations with low population density, it can also be assumed that a considerable number will reside outside major Hungarian cities.

Data and limitations

This study is based on quantitative research and relies mostly on data provided by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (or *Központi Statisztikai Hivatal [KSH])* and Statistics Netherlands (or the *Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek [CBS])*.

The CBS data will be used to learn more about emigration from the Netherlands and will be publicly available on their website (opendata.cbs.nl). Unfortunately, most countries focus on collecting data on immigration rather than on emigration; therefore, the data are often incomplete. Someone is counted as an emigrant if that person deregisters with the local government in the Netherlands, which is mandatory when someone plans to spend at least eight months abroad (CBS 2024). In this case, the destination country should be known in theory; however, we question whether this is always correct. To determine the actual number of people who emigrated, we also counted administrative removals. This often happens when the local authorities have realised that the residence of a person is no longer known; this person is not accessible and most probably does not reside in the Netherlands. However, when this happens, it is impossible to know where that person has migrated to, so it is not useful for this research.

Furthermore, we can assume that a significant proportion of the Dutch people who move to Hungary do so in a circular or temporal manner, so it is possible for them to maintain their residence in the Netherlands, while they only reside there for a portion of the year. For these reasons, we can assume that the actual number of Dutch people who have moved to Hungary is considerably higher than officially recorded. Lastly, for this study, only the people born in the Netherlands are considered to exclude Hungarian return migration. However, this means that only second-generation Hungarian migrants who move back to their parents' home country are included in the statistics. Despite these limitations, the data provided by the CBS are still very valuable for showing trends and verifying the validity of Hungary's immigration data.

Some remarks need to be made regarding the Hungarian data provided by the KSH. The first problem is whether to consider Dutch citizenship, Dutch origin, or both. If we consider Dutch citizens, we include people who were not born there but acquired Dutch citizenship, for example, because at least one of their parents was Dutch, or people who were naturalised. On the other hand, if we focus on people born in the Netherlands, this includes foreign citizens who were born there and does not include Dutch citizens who were born abroad. Both have advantages and disadvantages, which are compared at the beginning of the empirical section. However, because the available data based on citizenship are more elaborate, the majority of this study focuses on people with Dutch citizenship. One part, where the number of Dutch people per municipality in Hungary will be explored, will take both citizenship and place of birth into account because this is how the data were made available.

In general, because of the nature of the Dutch migration to Hungary, we can assume that several Dutch people reside in Hungary, at least temporarily, without being registered; on the other hand, some people might be registered in Hungary while spending only small parts of the year there.

The data provided by the KSH used in this study are census data, which are produced every ten years and are publicly available (KSH 2022), and the general statistical database, which provides more regular information and is also publicly available (KSH 2024). A brief section of the paper uses data on Dutch citizens born in the Netherlands and residing in Hungary at the municipal level. These data, as well as the data focusing on the group of EU-13 citizens, have been provided by the statistical office but are not publicly available.

The advantage of a general database is that it makes it possible to obtain annual statistics on immigration to Hungary. We can use it to obtain flow data of immigrating people, which is based on the number of residence registrations for people from the European Economic Area or requests for residence permits for third-country nationals. Secondly it also informs us about the stock of foreign citizens that are residing in Hungary on January 1 of the given year (KSH 2024). Although this provides an annual update, the downside of the data is that the results are relatively general.

The census data, on the other hand, are the result of an extensive statistical survey that covers the entire population and is the largest collection of population data that aims to provide an accurate and detailed picture of the size, demographic characteristics, health, employment, living, and housing conditions of Hungary's population (KSH 2022). This provides us with more precise information about foreign citizens. The survey is compulsory and can be completed online through a questionnaire or a paper questionnaire which can be submitted by mail. If households do not fill out the questionnaire using either method, census officials visit their homes to collect information. The disadvantage of the census is that it is conducted only every ten years, and because of its extensive nature, it has inherent weaknesses, particularly regarding data on foreign citizens. While the goal was to encompass the entire population, some responses were inevitably missing, especially from foreign individuals who may not reside in Hungary year-round. Moreover, language barriers complicate the process for foreigners unfamiliar with Hungarian, making it difficult for them to complete surveys and communicate effectively with census officials. Other challenges include underreporting owing to concerns about immigration status, transient populations that are difficult to capture, and potential cultural sensitivities that may discourage participation. Collectively, these factors hinder the accuracy and completeness of census data for foreign citizens. One last general problem with the data and its interpretation is that the author paper does not understand the Hungarian language, and while the KSH database is available in English, there might be translation issues or incorrect interpretations.

The Dutch citizens in Hungary were compared in various ways with three other population groups: Hungarian citizens, foreign citizens (excluding Dutch and Hungarian nationals), and EU-13 citizens. The selection of these groups for comparison is somewhat arbitrary, and arguments can be made for and against these choices.

The EU-13 refers to countries that were part of the European Union in 1995, excluding the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. The UK was excluded because its departure from the EU has complicated migration patterns, potentially skewing trends observable in other EU-15 countries. The EU-13 group was selected because it represents a relatively selective set of countries with a longer history of free travel than countries that joined the EU later. Unfortunately, owing to the accessibility of data, on one hand the information about the age groups of the EU-13 countries, as well as geographical data at the county level, are unavailable. Instead, for these parts, the group of EU-9 countries was used, which are the countries with the highest number of citizens in Hungary in 2022, excluding Denmark, Finland, Luxembourg, and Portugal. These countries each have less than one thousand citizens in Hungary and, combined, make up 1,947 people out of a total of 45,106 EU-13 citizens.

Including the total foreign population in Hungary as a comparison group is essential to situate Dutch migration within the broader context of immigration to Hungary. Unlike Dutch migration, which is a relatively recent phenomenon, the total foreign population encompasses individuals from countries with a long-standing tradition of migration to Hungary. These groups may have established migration histories, offering valuable insights into how the Dutch migration diverged as a newer trend. Furthermore, the total foreign population often includes migrants from poorer countries whose demographic, social, and geographical characteristics are likely to differ significantly from those of the Dutch and EU-13 migrants. This comparison allows for a deeper understanding of the distinctiveness of Dutch migration patterns. It is important to note that most immigrants to Hungary originated from other European countries.

Furthermore, a Hungarian citizen group provided useful comparisons. It should be acknowledged that a significant portion of Hungarian citizens were either not born in Hungary or were naturalised after 2011, so they may not have deep historical or cultural ties to the country. However, including the native Hungarian population as a comparison group is essential to understand the unique characteristics of Dutch migrants in Hungary, such as their regional settlement preferences. Comparing the geographical, demographic and social traits of Dutch migrants with those of the local population offers valuable insights into their integration into Hungarian communities. This approach also sheds light on the potential challenges and opportunities arising from their presence, both nationally and in specific regions. By addressing these aspects, this study enhances its significance for policymakers.

By analysing the abovementioned data, despite its limitations, this study offers a representative sample that sheds light on migration trends. These trends are sufficiently robust, and it is evident that these limitations are unlikely to significantly affect the results. Importantly, these findings serve as a basis for further qualitative research, which is essential for achieving a comprehensive understanding of the west-to-east migration dynamics within the EU. This study provides an important basis for this understudied but growing phenomenon.

Methodology

This study employs quantitative methods due to the limited existing research on this specific topic. A quantitative approach is well-suited in providing an overarching view of the phenomenon. The findings from this study can serve as a foundation for future, more in-depth qualitative research.

All calculations, graphs, and tables were produced by the authors using Microsoft Excel. The maps were created using QGIS and GeoDa software. The first part of the study focuses on the prevalence, demographic, and social background of the four studied population groups in Hungary: Hungarian citizens, Dutch citizens, EU-13 citizens, and the total group of foreign population. It examines their numbers, age, gender distribution, education level, employment rates, and reliance on public benefits. Furthermore, the evolution of these elements is analysed over time.

The second part of the study examines the geographical distribution of these population groups by settlement type and their historical evolution. Four settlement types are distinguished: Budapest, towns with county rights, towns, and villages. Subsequently, the demographic and social characteristics of each population group are compared based on settlement type and region.

To examine the clustering of Dutch citizens at the district level in Hungary, a spatial autocorrelation analysis was performed using GeoDa and the Univariate Local Moran's I method. GeoDa is an open-source spatial software program used for spatial data analysis and visualisation. It is user-friendly and well-suited in performing and visualising autocorrelation analyses. Spatial autocorrelation analysis measures how similar or dissimilar spatial data points are – in this case, the number of Dutch residents across geographic areas – revealing patterns in the data.

By applying the Univariate Local Moran's I method with 999 permutations and a significance level (p-value) of 0.05, this analysis ensured the statistical validation of the observed spatial clusters. These clusters were visually represented using local indicators of spatial association (LISA) cluster maps, which illustrated areas with high (high–high clusters) and low (low–low clusters) concentrations of Dutch citizens. High–high (HH) clusters indicate districts with a high concentration of Dutch citizens surrounded by similarly high-density districts, suggesting spatial attraction or concentration. Conversely, low–low (LL) clusters indicate districts with a low

concentration of Dutch citizens surrounded by similarly low-density districts, suggesting potential dispersion or lower attractiveness.

Similar to any statistical method, spatial autocorrelation analysis has certain limitations, one of which is the multiple comparison problem. However, as the results align with findings from other analyses in this study, the method is considered a valuable addition (Anselin 1995).

To compare spatial similarities and dissimilarities among the studied population groups at the county level for the years 2001, 2011, and 2022, the dissimilarity index was used. This index is commonly employed to assess residential segregation between two distinct groups within a geographic unit. It was calculated using the following formula (White–Kim 2005):

$$D = \frac{1}{2}\sum_{i=1}^{I}\left|\frac{n_{ij}}{N_j} - \frac{n_{ik}}{N_k}\right|$$

where *j* and *k* represent the two distinct groups being compared; n_{ij} is the population of group j in the *i*-th unit; n_{ik} is the population of group *k* in the *i*-th unit; N_j is the total population of group *j*; and N_k is the total population of group *k*.

The dissimilarity index ranged from 0 to 1, where 0 indicates complete integration and 1 indicates complete segregation. It measures the percentage of one group that would need to relocate to achieve an even distribution across geographic units (White–Kim 2005).

A major strength of the dissimilarity index is its historical significance. Since it has been widely used since the early 20th century, it provides a valuable historical dataset in analysing segregation trends over time. Additionally, the index is normalised on a scale from 0 to 1, making it easy to interpret, with 0 indicates an equal distribution and 1 indicates total segregation. Another key advantage is its compositional invariance, meaning the index is not affected by the relative sizes of the groups, making it a robust measure for comparison. Furthermore, it offers an intuitive interpretation, representing the proportion of one group that would need to relocate to achieve an even distribution.

Despite its usefulness, the dissimilarity index has certain limitations (Massey–Denton 1988). It does not satisfy the principle of transfers: redistributing individuals across units that exceed or fall below the mean does not alter the index value. This is a limitation when evaluating the impact of redistribution on overall segregation. The index cannot easily be decomposed to analyse segregation within subgroups or multiple groups simultaneously. It was primarily designed for two-group comparisons, limiting its applicability in more diverse settings. Although adjustments have been made for multiple-groups comparisons, they are not widely used.

The dissimilarity index was used to analyse and compare segregation at the county level between Dutch citizens and other foreign citizens, Dutch citizens and other EU

citizens, Dutch citizens and Hungarian citizens, foreign citizens and Hungarian citizens, and foreign EU citizens and Hungarian citizens.

Dutch migration to Hungary: numbers and trends

The first section of the empirical analysis examines the evolution of Dutch migration to Hungary and compares it with other population groups in the country. To define 'Dutch people', three criteria are considered: Dutch citizenship, origin (birth in the Netherlands), or a combination of both. Figure 2 illustrates these trends from 2001 to 2024, showing similar patterns across the indicators, with slight variations. The number of Dutch citizens was consistently higher than the number defined by origin, with gaps ranging from 152 to 280 individuals. For practical reasons, this study primarily focuses on citizenship, as it offers broader data availability. However, it acknowledges that some Dutch citizens may not have strong cultural ties to the Netherlands. The small differences between indicators support the validity of this methodological choice.

The number of Dutch citizens in Hungary rose sharply from 324 in 2001 to 3,848 in 2024. This rise is partly attributable to chain migration, where migrants follow peers who have successfully relocated. The early 21st century saw a steady rise, peaking at over 400 in 2004, followed by a decline in 2005 after Hungary joined the EU. This drop may reflect legal uncertainties, administrative delays, or changing registration preferences due to Hungary's impending Schengen accession in 2007 (Hárs 2009, Juhász 1995).

Between 2006 and 2007, the number of Dutch citizens in Hungary exceeded 1,000, suggesting a growing influx, possibly influenced by delayed registrations. In 2008 and 2009, migration continued to increase, albeit at a slower pace, likely due to the global financial crisis of 2007–2008, which may have delayed migration decisions or investments.

After 2008, the Dutch population in Hungary continued to grow, reaching 1,933 in 2011. However, a declined occurred in 2012, likely due to the amended Citizen Act of 2011. This legislation simplified the process of foreign-born Hungarians to obtain Hungarian citizenship. This may have led some Dutch citizens to change their citizenship status or affected how migration data was recorded, contributing to the decline in 2012.

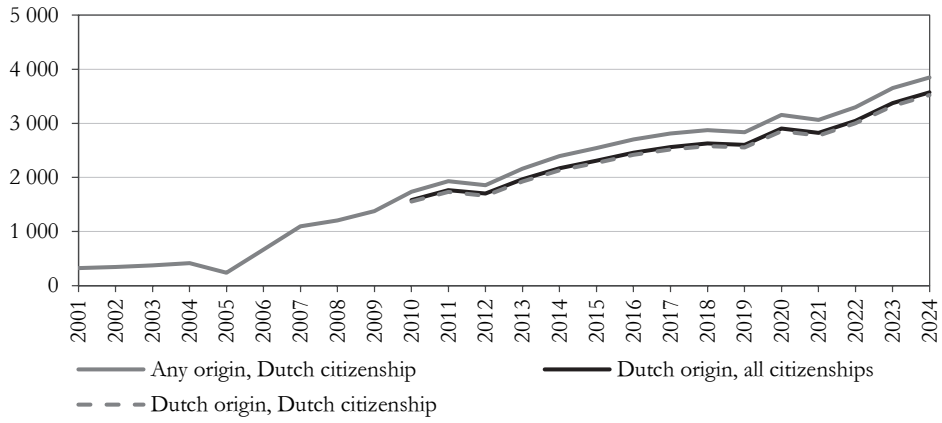
Between 2012 and 2018, the number of Dutch citizens in Hungary continued to increase, although at a slower rate, before declining in 2019. In 2020, the Dutch population in Hungary initially increased, but then declined due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic affected migration patterns in several ways. First, reducing the migration willingness of potential Dutch migrants, with many potential Dutch migrants postponing or cancelling their plans to move to Hungary. Second, as an important transit country, Hungary implemented immigration restrictions and

regulations in 2020 (Paul 2020). Additionally, the pandemic has prompted many individuals to return to their home countries (Martin–Bergmann 2021, Mencutek 2022, Paul 2020).

However, the impact of the pandemic on the Dutch population in Hungary was relatively mild and short-lived. Numbers rebounded quickly, reaching 3,652 Dutch citizens by 2023. According to the CBS Poland has also experienced a significant influx of Dutch citizens in recent years (CBS 2024).

Figure 2

Number of Dutch people in Hungary, based on origin and citizenship



Source: own processing based on KSH (2024).

To verify the Hungarian data on the evolution of the Dutch citizen population in Hungary, we can also examine the available data from the CBS on migration from the Netherlands to Hungary. In the Netherlands, someone is considered an emigrant when they are deregistered from the population register, which is compulsory if they plan to live abroad for longer than eight months, but this does not always happen. Some people also get 'administratively deregistered' by the authorities if the local government realises that these people no longer live in their municipality. In this case, the destination country was unknown.

However, it is important to note that most countries, including the Netherlands, tend to have more accurate statistics on immigration than on emigration. This means that emigration data can only serve as a complementary source for verifying certain trends.

Unlike Hungary, the Netherlands are immigrants. By 2022, 403,108 immigrants and 179,310 people have emigrated (including administrative deregistration), creating a migration surplus (CBS 2024). Focusing on emigration from the Netherlands in general, we see that only 16.5% of the emigrants had a Dutch background in 2023, meaning that both parents were born in the Netherlands (independent of where the

person was born). In 2023, almost 72.9% of the emigrants did not have Dutch citizenship, and 78.6% were not born in the Netherlands (CBS 2024). Many of the emigrants born in the Netherlands moved to Belgium, Germany, Spain, or United Kingdom. First generation immigrants often return to their country of origin, and almost two-thirds of the second generation emigrate to their parents' country of origin (CBS 2024). This resulted in a migration deficit for Dutch citizens in the Netherlands.

The total group of emigrants is relatively young, with 40% between the ages of 25 and 40 in 2022. Only 3.3% of the patients were aged 65 years or older (CBS 2024). However, while only 12.3% of the total emigrants were 50 years or older in 2023, 20.9% of Dutch citizens emigrated. There was also male dominance among emigrants; in 2023, 51.6% of the total emigrating citizens were men, which was slightly higher for Dutch emigrating citizens (54.3%).

Data that specifically deal with emigration to Hungary are scarce and consider the country of birth, unlike the rest of this study, which focuses on citizenship. While some caution is needed, these data still provide some insights: in 2001, only 2.5‰ of Dutch-born emigrants went to Hungary, but this rose especially during and after 2004 and reached 10.5‰ in 2022, meaning that one in a hundred people who were born in the Netherlands and decided to emigrate went to Hungary (CBS 2024). Thus, Hungary has become increasingly important among Dutch-born migrants, although a significant part of this group may be second- or third-generation Hungarian migrants who have returned to the country of their (grand)parents.

The annual number of Dutch-born people who emigrated to Hungary[1] has remained low, similar to the number of Dutch-born people who moved from Hungary to the Netherlands[2] between 2001 and 2003. In 2004, the Dutch government recorded 71 Dutch-born individuals who emigrated to Hungary and 54 who moved in another direction. These numbers diverged significantly over the years, and the number of emigrants began to exceed the number of returnees. In 2022, 436 Dutch people will move to Hungary, and 122 will make the opposite move. Although precise analysis is somewhat tricky due to the nature of the emigration data, similar fluctuations are visible in these data compared to the KSH records. The number of emigrants to Hungary rose quickly after the country's accession to the EU and dropped due to Covid-19 in 2020, after which it quickly rose again.

Owing to the accuracy and accessibility of the datasets, the rest of the paper focuses on data provided by the KSH, which emphasises citizenship.

To better understand the specificities of the Dutch migration to Hungary, it is worthwhile to compare the evolution of the Dutch population in Hungary with that

[1] This flow data per year of the Dutch-born people who deregister in their Dutch municipality and of whom the destination country, Hungary, is known.

[2] This flow data per year of the Dutch-born people who (re)register in the Netherlands of whom the country they have migrated from, Hungary, is known.

of other population groups in the country (Table 1). Over the two decades spanning from 2001 to 2022, Hungary witnessed a decline in its native population, while the number of foreign citizens increased significantly. Both decades saw an over fifty percent increase in the foreign population. The number of foreign citizens coming from EU-13 countries (EU-15 countries minus the United Kingdom and the Netherlands) grew by over 210% in the first decade of the century and by 53% from 2011 to 2022. The number of Dutch citizens in Hungary surged between 2001 and 2011, and while it showed more modest growth between 2011 and 2022, it still outpaced both foreign and EU foreign citizens. This evolution positioned Dutch nationals as a notable segment of Hungary's citizens, accounting for 7.2% of EU-14 citizens in 2022, while it was only 3.7% in 2001. Simultaneously, the Dutch population segment of Hungary's total foreign population will grow from 0.4% in 2001 to 1.6% in 2022.

Table 1

Evolution of groups registered in Hungary, depending on citizenship

Year	Number of Dutch citizens	Evolution			
		Dutch	EU-13[a)]	foreign	Hungarian
		%			
2001	369	+457.72	+210.25	+53.40	–3.08
2011	2,058				
2022	3,483	+69.24	+53.18	+52.77	–4.17

a) EU-15, excluding the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.
Source: own processing based on KSH (2022).

Examining the numbers in more detail, we see that the number of citizens in every EU-13 country doubled between 2001 and 2022. Between 2001 and 2011, only Ireland (675%), Portugal (1,643%), and Spain (909%) had a higher population increase than the Netherlands; however, these countries had only 52, 14, and 74 citizens living in Hungary in 2001, respectively, so the absolute increase is still moderate. For the second period (2011–2022), Belgium, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal, and Spain show a higher increase, whereas in absolute terms, in 2022, only Austria (4,770), France (4,366), Germany (22,184), and Italy (3,879) have a higher number of citizens in Hungary.

These empirical findings are consistent with those reported in literature. The substantial rise in the number of EU citizens during the initial period can be attributed to Hungary's accession to the European Union and the subsequent revision of migration legislation. The amended Citizen Act of 2011, which facilitated the acquisition of Hungarian citizenship for foreign-born individuals of Hungarian ancestry, potentially caused decelerated growth in the EU-13 citizen influx during the latter period. Notably, the relatively stable growth in the total foreign population

across both decades, despite the facilitation of Hungarian citizenship acquisition, indicates the diversification of immigrant cohorts.

Another remarkable observation is the decline in the population of Hungarian citizens. The naturalisation of individuals with Hungarian heritage and growing return migration has thus failed to offset the increasing emigration and natural decrease in Hungarian citizens.

Demographic and social characteristics

Now that we have established a better understanding of the numerical evolution of Dutch citizens in Hungary, we now turn our attention to the demographic and social characteristics of this community. Figure 2, presented earlier in this paper, illustrates the significant increase in the number of Dutch citizens in Hungary since the start of the 21st century.

To gain a deeper understanding of the evolution of the Dutch population, it is useful to analyse age distribution trends (Table 2). While all age cohorts increased in absolute terms between 2001 and 2024, it is insightful to examine the relative importance of each age group compared to the total Dutch population in Hungary. In 2001 and 2005, the 35–49 age group was by far the largest. However, its proportion has declined significantly, accounting for only 14.2% of the Dutch population in 2024. Similarly, the younger age cohorts (0–19 and 20–34) have also decreased in relative proportion between 2001 and 2024. In contrast, older age groups, particularly those aged 50–59 and 60 and above, have grown substantially in importance. The share of the 50–59 age group is expected to increase from 17.9% in 2001 to 23.8% in 2024. Most notably, the oldest cohort, those aged 60 years and older, experienced a dramatic rise, growing from just 9.6% in 2001 to 42.6% in 2024. This means that by 2024, nearly two-thirds of Dutch citizens in Hungary will be at least 50 years old. This shift can partly be attributed to natural aging, as individuals who remain in Hungary transition into older cohorts over time. However, this also reflects a broader demographic transformation within the Dutch population in Hungary, shifting from younger individuals, possibly accompanied by their children, to a pronounced dominance of individuals approaching or beyond retirement age. The growth of the Dutch population in Hungary is primarily driven by a growing number of individuals over the age of 49.

Interestingly, although women are still underrepresented in 2024, comprising only 42.3% of the Dutch population in Hungary, the gender balance has gradually become more equal since 2004 when women constituted just 35.2% of the population (KSH 2024). This trend can be attributed to the increasing number of elderly people among Dutch immigrants, as this type of migration is mostly undertaken by couples or single women (Kincses 2020, Spaan et al. 2022). In contrast, the early 2000s were

characterised by a higher prevalence of younger single men. Additionally, women's longer life expectancy than men might contribute to this shift.

Table 2

Evolution of age distribution of Dutch-born Dutch citizens in Hungary

(%)

Age group	2001	2005	2010	2015	2020	2024
0–19	11.42	7.20	11.01	8.84	6.78	6.00
20–34	22.22	13.56	12.46	16.08	17.10	13.44
35–49	38.89	40.68	28.26	19.73	14.95	14.24
50–59	17.90	16.10	21.86	20.20	21.09	23.75
60+	9.57	22.46	26.41	35.14	40.09	42.57
Total number of persons	324	236	1,734	2,544	3,158	3,848

Source: own processing based on KSH (2022).

The analysis of the age distribution of Dutch citizens in Hungary revealed several notable trends compared to other population groups in the country. Table3 is based on census data and is, therefore, slightly different from table 2, which is based on the yearly extract of the population register. By the 2022 census, over two-thirds of the Dutch population in Hungary were aged 50 years or older, a substantial increase from just 25.5% in 2001. In contrast, the proportion of Hungarian citizens in this age group increased from 33.4% in 2001 to 40.2% in 2022, initially higher than the Dutch share but significantly lower in recent years. Similarly, while the share of foreigners aged 50 years and older has also increased in Hungary, fewer than one-third of this group will fall into this category by 2022.

For the EU-9 foreigners (representing the nine EU-13 countries with the largest populations in Hungary due to limited data on the remaining EU-13 countries), the proportion of individuals aged 50 years and older was higher than that of the Dutch population in 2001. This is largely due to the dominance of German and Austrian citizens within this group in 2001, comprising 62.2% and 11.9% within the group of EU-9 countries, respectively. In 2001, 33.2% of Germans and 43.6% of Austrians in Hungary were aged 50 or older, suggesting that these countries have a longer tradition of elderly migration to Hungary. By 2022, these figures will rise sharply to 66.5% for Germans and 72.1% for Austrians. Consequently, the overall share of individuals aged 50 years and older in the EU-9 population also increased, although not as dramatically as in the Dutch population. This difference can be attributed to the growing prevalence of the other EU-9 nationalities with younger demographic characteristics.

While Germany (51.4%) and Austria (11.1%) remain the largest EU-9 sending countries to Hungary, the age profiles of other nationalities, such as French and Italian citizens, have shown relative stability over recent censuses, with approximately 22% and 33% of citizens aged 50 years and older, respectively. Furthermore, other countries with growing representation within the EU-9 group in Hungary generally

have younger populations. For instance, the Spanish population in Hungary is becoming younger, with only 10.1% aged 50 or older in 2022. Similarly, the share of Swedish citizens in this age group has decreased over time.

By 2022, only Austria (72.1%) will surpass the Netherlands in terms of the proportion of people aged 50 years and older. Similarly, Austria, Germany, and Belgium had a higher share of individuals in this age group than Hungary, aligning with the Netherlands. This indicates that the trend of elderly migration to Hungary is not a universal phenomenon across the EU-9 group but rather a selective trend influenced by specific countries.

Table 3

Share of population 50 years and older per population group in Hungary

(%)

Year	Dutch	EU-9[a)]	Foreigners	Hungarians
2001	25.5	32.6	18.2	33.4
2011	44.8	44.3	28.1	38.1
2022	67.8	53.0	30.3	40.2

a) This data is only available for 9 EU-13 countries: Germany, Austria, France, Italy, Spain, Belgium, Sweden, Ireland and Greece. These are the EU-13 citizenships with the highest prevalence in Hungary. Denmark, Finland, Luxembourg and Portugal are excluded.

Source: own processing based on KSH (2022).

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the characteristics of Dutch residents in Hungary, the following section examines their level of education (Table 4), dependency on public benefits (Table 5), and employment rates (Table 6). It also compares these aspects with EU-13 citizens, total foreign citizens, and Hungarian citizens, according to the 2001, 2011, and 2022 censuses.

One notable trend was the increasing share of highly educated individuals across all studied population groups over recent censuses, with the Dutch population being a notable exception. Among the Dutch residents in Hungary, the proportion of those with tertiary education declined sharply from over 43% in 2001 to 26.7% in 2011, followed by a modest increase to 28.9% in 2022. This latest figure is comparable to that of the EU-13 foreign population, slightly below the overall foreign population, but still higher than that of Hungarian citizens.

Within the EU-13 countries, there is a clear divide: Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Austria have between 20–25% of their citizens in Hungary with tertiary qualifications. On the other hand, other countries exhibit significantly higher levels of higher education, hovering around or exceeding 40%, with Ireland leading with 51.2%.

Second, almost half of the Dutch residents in Hungary were economically inactive and received some kind of public benefit in 2022, compared to approximately 20% in 2001. This dependency rate was significantly higher than that in the other population groups. For the total foreign population, the dependency rate was the

lowest, and for Hungarian citizens, the dependency on public benefits decreased significantly between 2001 and 2022. While an increasing share of EU foreigners is dependent on public benefits, this figure remains considerably lower than that of the Dutch population. Looking at individual countries within the EU-13 group, only Austrian (51.9%), Belgian (47.2%) and German (51.1%) citizens in Hungary were more dependent on public benefits. Apart from Luxembourg, with 32.3% of Hungary's citizens relying on public benefits, the rates in other countries are significantly lower, ranging from 5.8% (Spain and Portugal) to 22.5% (Finland).

Finally, the evolution of employment rates among Dutch citizens in Hungary aligns with these findings. While almost half of the Dutch population in Hungary was employed in 2001, this number will drop to 31% by 2022, a much lower rate than in other groups. The employment rate of Hungarian and foreign citizens is expected to increase between 2001 and 2022. The share of working people in the EU-13 countries remained stable at approximately 43%. The employment rate of Dutch citizens in Hungary is lower than that in any EU-13 country. Within the EU-13 group, the same trend is visible again; the employment rates of Belgium, Germany, and Austria are the only countries that have decreased between 2001 and 2022. These countries, together with Luxembourg, are the only EU-13 countries with employment rates lower than 50%, while the Portuguese population has an employment rate of 75.4%, which is slightly higher than that of Spain (71.3%).

In summary, Dutch citizens residing in Hungary in 2022 are generally older, less educated, have lower employment rates, and have a higher dependency on benefits than those at the beginning of the century. Most of these trends contrast with those observed in other population groups of the country. When zooming into the EU-13 country level, a clear distinction emerges: Germany, Belgium, Austria, and, to a lesser extent, Luxembourg share similarities with the Netherlands, characterised by low employment rates, lower levels of education, older age, and higher dependency on public benefits. These patterns contrast with those of other EU-13 countries, which generally show higher employment rates, greater educational attainment, younger populations, and less reliance on public support.

Table 4

Share with tertiary education, by citizenship

(%)

Year	Dutch	EU-13	Foreign	Hungarian
2001	43.36	23.34	17.25	9.08
2011	26.68	24.26	22.32	14.37
2022	28.88	29.55	32.22	18.79

Source: own processing based on KSH (2022).

Table 5

Share economically inactive but receiving benefits, by citizenship

(%)

Year	Dutch	EU-13	Foreign	Hungarian
2001	19.78	27.32	18.88	32.53
2011	35.81	32.32	20.65	29.81
2022	46.57	37.55	17.04	23.73

Source: own processing based on KSH (2022).

Table 6

Share employed, by citizenship

(%)

Year	Dutch	EU-13	Foreign	Hungarian
2001	49.59	43.06	43.42	36.12
2011	39.46	42.39	49.42	39.53
2022	30.89	43.33	54.45	49.01

Source: own processing based on KSH (2022).

Dutch migration to Hungary: spatial characteristics

Having established an understanding of the increasing number of Dutch residents in Hungary and their comparison with other population groups, this section examines their spatial distribution within the country. While the proportion of Dutch residents registered in the capital city is comparable to that of Hungarians living in Budapest, it is significantly lower than that of the total foreign population and the EU-13 foreign population in Hungary (Table 7). Approximately one in five Hungarians resides in towns with county rights. Although this proportion is slightly lower for foreign and EU-13 citizens, it is notably lower for Dutch citizens. When distinguishing between urban and rural residents, the vast majority of Hungarian, EU-13, and foreign populations reside in towns. However, only 36.7% of the Dutch population lives in urban areas, indicating a strong preference for rural living.

Dutch citizens are primarily located outside Budapest and other towns, with many opting to live in villages. This distribution has shifted over time. In 2001, almost 45% of Dutch citizens resided in Budapest; however, this proportion declined significantly over the years, particularly in the 2010s (Table 8). While the absolute number of Dutch residents in the capital has increased, the majority of the growth in the Dutch population has occurred outside Budapest, predominantly in villages. Therefore, we conclude that the typical Dutch migrant in Hungary has transitioned from being an urban resident in 2001 to a rural inhabitant in 2022. Although the proportion of EU-13 and Hungarian citizens living in Budapest also declined slightly across the three censuses, the total foreign population increasingly preferred to settle in the capital. Among EU-13 countries, several groups maintained a strong preference for

Budapest, most notably the Irish, with 78.7% residing in the capital. Certain EU-13 countries exhibit distinct settlement patterns. In 2022, only a small proportion of citizens from Austria (12.3%), Germany (16.6%), and Belgium (22.3%) resided in Budapest, similar to Dutch migrants. However, unlike the Dutch, migrants from these three countries tended to settle in towns rather than villages: 43.4% of Austrian, 53.1% of German, and 44.4% of Belgian resided in towns (including Budapest) rather than villages. This pattern contrast sharply with Dutch migration, which exhibits a strong rural character, as Dutch migrants are significantly more likely to settle in villages.

Table 7

Share of population living in different types of settlement, by citizenship, 2022

(%)

Citizenship	Budapest	Towns with county rights[a)]	Towns[b)]	Villages
Hungarian	16.91	20.46	69.93	30.07
Foreign	45.09	17.49	79.96	20.04
EU-13	34.17	15.41	65.74	34.57
Dutch	16.22	5.46	36.69	63.31

a) Excluding Budapest.
b) Including Budapest.
Source: own processing based on KSH (2022).

Table 8

Share of Dutch, EU and total foreign citizens living in Budapest

Year	Dutch citizens Budapest	Proportion			
		Dutch citizens	EU-13	foreign citizens	Hungarian citizens
		%			
2001	156	44.72	36.55	37.45	17.25
2011	421	20.46	26.06	39.63	17.08
2022	565	16.22	34.17	45.09	16.91

Source: own processing based on KSH (2022).

Table 9 shows that Dutch citizens residing in Budapest have different demographic and social characteristic than the overall Dutch population in Hungary. Those living in the capital are generally younger, more highly educated, employed, and less dependent on public benefits. Similar differences are observed among other foreign population groups, although they are less pronounced. Interestingly, the differences between Dutch citizens and EU-13 citizens in Budapest are relatively small. This suggests that outside the capital, the Dutch population in Hungary diverges more distinctly from other foreign groups.

Within the Hungarian population, differences between those living in Budapest and the rest of the country were minimal for most indicators. The only notable distinction was in education levels, with the Hungarian population in Budapest having a higher proportion of highly educated individuals compared to the national average.

Table 9

Employment level, dependency on public benefits, education level and age of people in Budapest and in general, by citizenship, 2022

(%)

Citizenship	Place of residence	Employed	Receiving benefits	Tertiary education	50 years and older[a)]
Dutch	total	30.89	46.57	28.88	67.84
	Budapest	69.03	10.97	51.86	32.04
EU-13	total	43.33	37.55	29.55	39.05
	Budapest	66.86	12.27	47.60	23.51
Foreign	total	55.64	15.56	32.39	28.36
	Budapest	60.51	8.88	42.78	20.94
Hungarian	total	49.01	23.73	18.79	40.18
	Budapest	53.79	21.77	33.50	39.62

a) Data for the age groups of EU-13 citizens is based on EU-9 (Germany, Austria, France, Italy, Spain, Belgium, Sweden, Ireland, Greece) due to data accessibility reasons.

Source: own processing based on KSH (2022).

Table 10

Characteristics of Dutch population per settlement type in Hungary, 2022

(%)

Settlement type	Male	Tertiary education	Employed	Benefits	50 years and over	Share of total
Budapest	73.3	51.9	69.0	11.0	32.0	16.2
Towns of county rank	77.4	37.9	46.3	31.6	52.1	5.5
Other towns	67.1	30.4	37.9	42.4	68.1	15.0
Villages	55.3	21.9	18.1	58.0	78.3	63.3
Total	61.2	28.9	30.9	46.6	67.8	100

Source: own processing based on KSH (2022).

Table 10 presents the social and demographic characteristics of Dutch citizens in Hungary, based on settlement type. The data reveal clear differences within the Dutch population, depending on whether reside in towns or villages. In every region, the proportion of men is lower in villages than in towns. Village dwellers tend to be older, have lower levels of education, and are more dependent on public benefits than their urban counterparts. This highlights notable disparities between villages and towns. Interestingly, these socio-economic indicators align with the settlement hierarchy: the lower the settlement rank, the lower the male dominance, education level, and

employment rate, conversely, dependency on public benefits and the proportion of people aged 50 and older increase in smaller settlements. Given that 63.3% of Dutch citizens in Hungary reside in villages, the demographic and social characteristics of village dwellers play a dominant role in shaping the overall national profile of Dutch migrants in Hungary.

Having established that Dutch citizens are more prevalent outside the capital and in villages compared to other foreign population groups, this section examines their regional distribution within Hungary in comparison with these groups. Table 11 presents the distribution of Dutch citizens across Hungary, while Figure 3 illustrates the distributions of Dutch, foreign, Hungarian, and EU-9 populations by county. The EU-9 category was used because county-level data for the other EU-13 countries – which have relatively smaller populations in Hungary – were unavailable. Consequently, 1,947 EU-13 citizens were excluded from the analysis, of whom, 1,280 reside in Budapest. Therefore, their omission is unlikely to significantly affect the distribution patterns shown in Figure 3c.

Southern Transdanubia is the most popular region for Dutch citizens, with almost 38% residing there. While this region also houses a significant proportion of the EU-13 population (18.6%), it is less important for the total foreign population in Hungary (7.72%) and is the least populated region for Hungarian citizens (8.92%). When examining individual EU-13 countries, we find that Germany (28.8%) and especially Belgium (32.9%) have significant shares of their populations living in Southern Transdanubia. However, within this region, German citizens primarily reside in Somogy county, which borders Lake Balaton.

At the county level, Hungarian citizens are more evenly distributed than foreign groups, with a significant share residing in Northern Hungary. While foreign citizens are concentrated in Budapest, they are also present in eastern Hungary, whereas EU-9 citizens are largely absent in this region. Interestingly, a notable proportion of Dutch citizens reside in Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok County (4.11%) and Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County (4.45%). While Dutch citizens are primarily concentrated in western Hungary, there are differences between the Dutch and EU-9 populations within this region. Although Somogy County is also important for Dutch citizens, Baranya County is the most popular in Southern Transdanubia, which houses over one-fifth of the total Dutch population in Hungary. In contrast, only 3.7% of Hungary's total population lived there in 2022 (Table 12).

A significant proportion of Dutch citizens (27%) reside in Central Hungary, which includes Budapest and Pest County. However, this share is higher for Hungarians (31%). While Pest County is not particularly attractive to foreign populations, Budapest remains a key destination, with almost 40% of the EU-13 citizens and 53% of all foreigner citizens residing in Central Hungary. Central Transdanubia had the lowest share of Dutch citizens and a low share of EU-13 (6.3%) and foreign citizens (7.2%).

Interestingly, Western Transdanubia has one of the lowest shares of Dutch citizens, despite being a key destination for EU-13 citizens, with almost 20% of them residing there. This pattern can be attributed to its proximity to Lake Balaton, which has historically attracted German migrants, and its border with Austria, where 62.9% of Austrians migrants in Hungary have settled. Northern Hungary has the lowest share of foreign citizens and EU-13 citizens (3.2%), although the proportion of Dutch residents is slightly higher. Dutch citizens, EU-13 nationals, and all foreigners seem underrepresented in the Northern and Southern Great Plains regions, with only 12–15% of these groups residing there. This contrasts with the Hungarian population, of whom more than 27% live in these regions (KSH 2022).

A temporal analysis reveals significant shifts in the regional distribution of Dutch citizens in Hungary between the first two decades of the century. In 2001, 44.7% of Dutch citizens resided in Budapest. By 2011, this figure had declined dramatically, with Southern Transdanubia overtaking Budapest as the region with the highest share of Dutch residents. In 2001, only 7.3% of Dutch migrants lived in this region. The importance of Pest County and Central Transdanubia also declined, although Pest saw a slight increase between 2011 and 2022. Western Transdanubia grew in popularity in the first decade but declined in the second decade. Northern Hungary became more attractive in the early 2000s, though its popularity declined slightly by 2022. The Northern Great Plains gradually gained importance, whereas the proportion of Dutch residents in the Southern Great Plains remained mostly stagnant. These trends further demonstrate that Dutch migration to Hungary has undergone significant geographical changes over the past two decades.

Census data reveal notable regional differences among Dutch citizens in Hungary. Males were overrepresented in every region, though Southern Transdanubia had the most balanced gender distribution (52.6% male). Examining educational attainment, in Pest, Central Transdanubia, and Western Transdanubia, around one in three Dutch citizens held a tertiary degree, a much higher proportion than in other regions. Furthermore, employment levels showed significant regional disparities. Pest and Central Transdanubia had employment rates of approximately 45%, while in other regions, fewer than one in four Dutch citizens were employed. Southern Transdanubia had the lowest employment rate of less than 15%. Regions with lower employment rates had higher dependency on public benefits, particularly in villages. Consequently, regions with lower employment rates have higher dependency on public benefits, with benefit dependency being higher in villages than in the entire region. Over 63% of Dutch village dwellers in Southern Transdanubia depend on public benefits. Additionally, there were clear age differences between the regions. While the average age of Dutch citizens in Budapest is 36.5 years, the average age in other areas of the country is significantly higher.

Now that we have a clear discussed earlier, 63.31% of Dutch citizens in Hungary live in villages, at a higher rate than other populations. Now that we have a clearer

picture of regional distribution, it is interesting to examine whether the village–town distribution is consistent within different regions for Dutch citizens and other groups. In every region, except Central Transdanubia, the majority of Dutch citizens live in villages, in contrast to the Hungarian population, whose majority live in towns in every region. For the foreign population, the majority lived in towns in every region, except Western Transdanubia. The most striking proportions of village dwellers among the Dutch population were found in Southern Transdanubia, Northern Hungary and Western Transdanubia. Interestingly, within the EU-13 population, the proportion of people living in villages in these regions is much lower: 61.1% in Southern Transdanubia, 40.4% in Northern Hungary, and 66.7% in Western Transdanubia. Thus, even when EU-13 nationals – mostly Germans, Austrians, and Belgians – settle in the same regions as Dutch citizens, Dutch migrants are more likely to move to villages than EU-13 citizens.

Table 11

Share of Dutch citizens living in towns or villages per region

(%)

Region	Towns	Village	Share living here
Budapest	100.00	0.00	16.22
Pest	39.02	60.98	11.11
Central Transdanubia	53.23	46.77	5.77
Western Transdanubia	21.67	78.33	5.83
Southern Transdanubia	10.45	89.55	37.90
Northern Hungary	10.88	89.12	8.18
Northern Great Plain	42.58	57.42	6.00
Southern Great Plain	48.88	51.12	8.99

Source: own processing based on KSH (2022).

Table 12

Distribution of population in counties in Southern Transdanubia, depending on citizenship, 2022

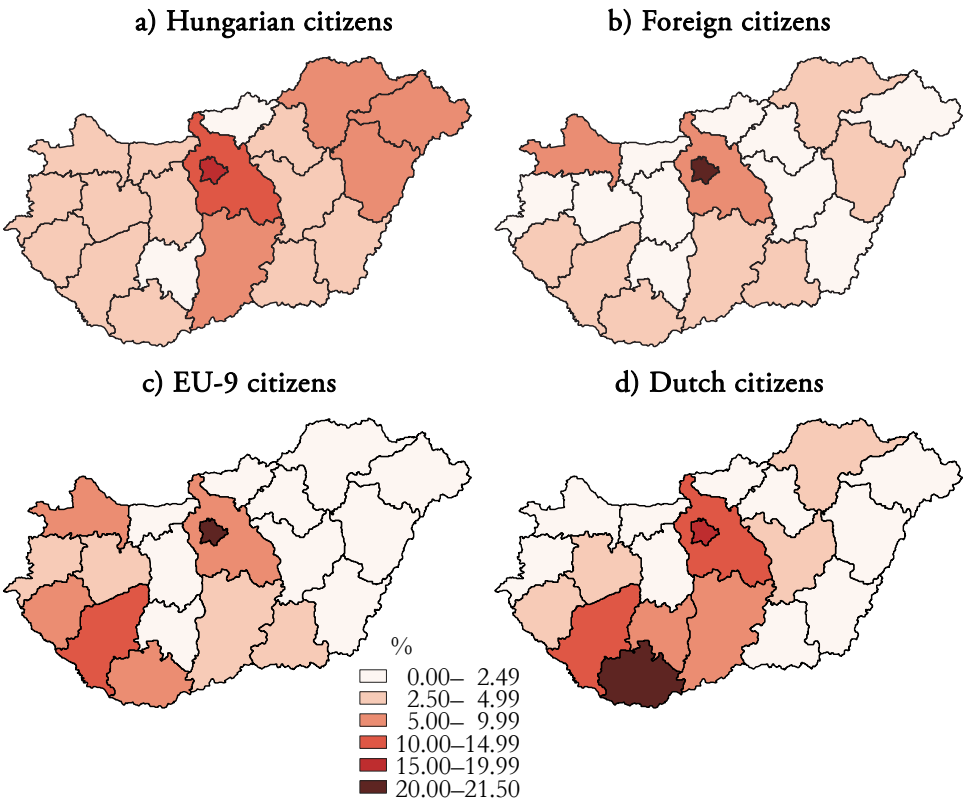
(%)

Southern Transdanubia	Share total	Share Dutch
Baranya county	3.69	21.50
Somogy county	3.06	11.02
Tolna county	2.17	5.37
Total region	8.91	37.90

Source: own processing based on KSH (2022).

Figure 3

Distribution of citizens of different nationalities in Hungary, in percentage by county (total = 100%), 2022



Source: own processing based on KSH (2022).

Building on the previous analysis of regional differences among Dutch citizens and other population groups in Hungary, it seems that first, some areas have higher concentrations of Dutch residents, while others are nearly devoid of them; second, their geographical distribution is different from the other population groups.

First, the spatial autocorrelation map at the district ('járás' in Hungarian) level shown in Figure 4 confirms the hypothesis that Dutch citizens in Hungary tend to cluster. In the southeast of the country, mostly in Southern Transdanubia, there is a significantly high cluster of Dutch residents. This suggests a strong, positive autocorrelation and thus the spatial clustering of Dutch citizens in this area. The only other clusters of Dutch citizens can be found in some parts of the pest side of Budapest and one isolated high–high value for the Nagykőrös district in the south of Pest County. In the southeastern and eastern regions of the country, there are

different low-low clusters. First, in the eastern part of Békés and the southeastern part of Hajdú-Bihar County neighbouring Romania, as well as the whole of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County, close to Ukraine in the east of the country. Apart from other isolated low–low districts, the Dutch in Hungary seem to be randomly distributed in the central and northern parts of the country.

To test the second hypothesis, that the geographical distribution of Dutch citizens in Hungary differs from that of other population groups, we will examine the level of segregation at the county level over the last three census years. The index of dissimilarity measures the evenness of distribution between two groups, where a value of 0 indicates perfect integration and a value of 1 indicates complete segregation. Table 13 reveals that the highest level of segregation in 2022 is between Dutch citizens and other foreign citizens. This is noteworthy, because the dissimilarity between these two groups increased significantly between 2001 and 2011. A key factor is that Budapest remains a major hub for foreigners but has diminished in importance for Dutch citizens. A similar, although less pronounced, trend was observed in the segregation between Dutch citizens and EU-9 foreigners.

When comparing Dutch and Hungarian citizens, we see that in 2001, the dissimilarity index was significantly higher than that of the previously discussed groups. Dutch and Hungarian citizens became less segregated by 2011, but the index increased again to 0.31 2022. Dutch citizens are slightly less segregated from Hungarians than are EU-9 citizens and the total group of foreigners, although these differences are small. It is noteworthy that segregation rose between Hungarians and EU-9 foreigners, as well as between Hungarians and the total foreign population, between 2001 and 2022, while segregation between Dutch and Hungarian citizens decreased.

Given the decreasing preference for Budapest as a place of residence for Dutch citizens since the beginning of the century, Table 14 shows the dissimilarity indices when excluding Budapest to see how segregated different population groups are outside the capital city. While the level of segregation between the Dutch and the total foreign population in 2022 is highest when Budapest is included, they appear to be less segregated outside the capital. Dutch citizens outside Budapest are equally segregated from foreign and Hungarian populations. Additionally, the level of segregation between Dutch and EU-9 citizens in 2022 is similar, regardless of whether Budapest is considered. This shows that while EU-9 citizens generally have a higher preference for Budapest than Dutch citizens, they also choose to settle in different places outside the capital city, as discussed earlier in this paper.

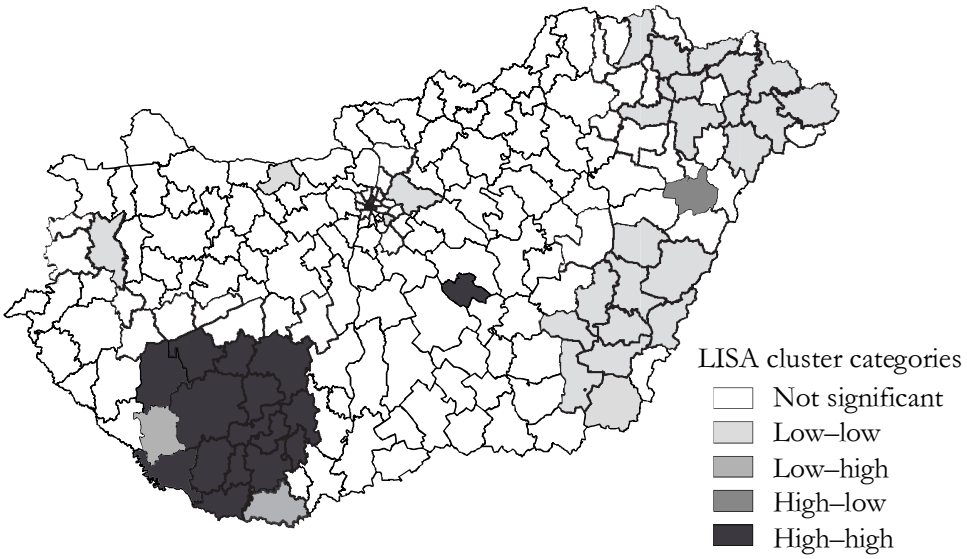
Interestingly, we see that the dissimilarity between Dutch and Hungarian citizens is higher outside Budapest, but the foreign population is much less segregated from the Hungarian population outside Budapest. By contrast, EU-9 citizens and Hungarians showed a moderately higher level of segregation outside Budapest. This value will also increase significantly between 2001 and 2022. This can be explained by

the fact that many EU-9 citizens settle close to the border with Austria or in tourist places such as Lake Balaton, which is often too expensive for the average Hungarian. Dutch citizens, on the other hand, mix slightly more with the Hungarian population, proving again that Dutch citizens are more likely to settle in non-traditional destinations for tourism and lifestyle migration, but prefer small villages elsewhere.

Overall, all segregation indices increased between 2001 and 2022, except for the segregation between Dutch and Hungarian citizens when Budapest was included. This indicates that segregation among all studied population groups is generally increasing.

Figure 4

LISA cluster analysis of Dutch-born Dutch citizens distribution per district in Hungary, 2022



Source: own processing based on KSH (2022).

Table 13

Dissimilarity index for counties in Hungary

Compared population groups	2001	2011	2022
Dutch citizens – other foreign citizens	0.19	0.35	0.44
Dutch citizens – EU-9 citizens	0.20	0.25	0.35
Dutch citizens – Hungarian citizens	0.35	0.28	0.31
Foreign citizens (excluding Dutch) – Hungarian citizens	0.23	0.25	0.32
EU-9 – Hungarian citizens	0.25	0.31	0.33

Source: own processing based on KSH (2022).

Table 14

Dissimilarity index for counties in Hungary, excluding Budapest

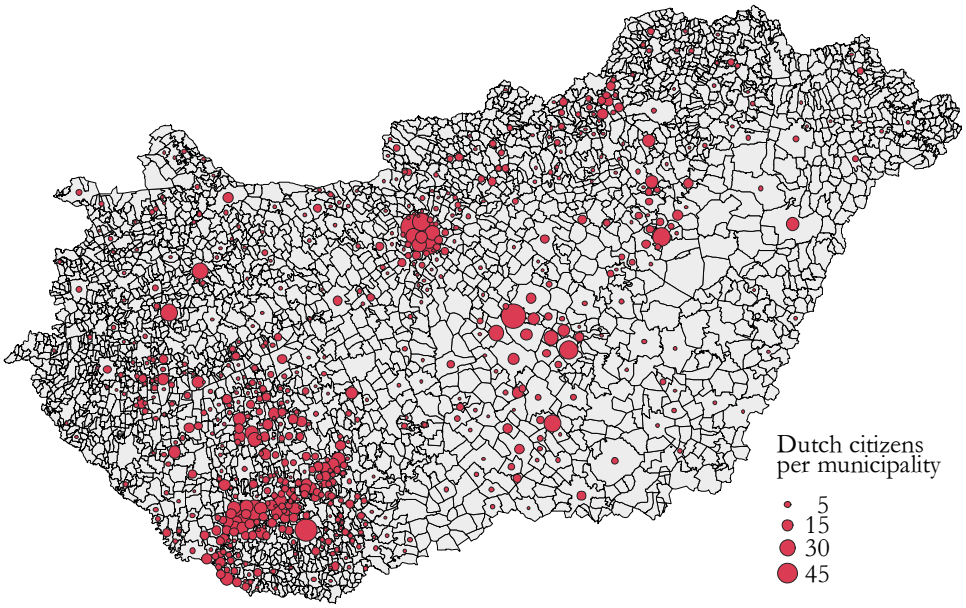
Compared population groups	2001	2011	2022
Dutch citizens – other foreign citizens	0.28	0.35	0.37
Dutch citizens – EU-9 citizens	0.28	0.28	0.34
Dutch citizens – Hungarian citizens	0.29	0.32	0.37
Foreign citizens (excluding Dutch) – Hungarian citizens	0.15	0.18	0.18
EU-9 – Hungarian citizens	0.19	0.31	0.39

Source: own processing based on KSH (2022).

To complete this article, we examine the local distribution of Dutch citizens in Hungary. Figure 5 illustrates the number of Dutches per municipality, and Table 15 shows the Hungarian municipalities with the highest number of Dutch citizens together with the share of Dutch citizens in the total population. It is noteworthy that Dutch citizens are present almost everywhere in the country, yet certain areas show clear overrepresentation. There was a significant concentration in and around the capital cities. Additionally, Southern Transdanubia – particularly the counties of Somogy and Baranya – is notably populated by the Dutch. In this region, Dutch citizens are dispersed across many municipalities rather than concentrated in specific areas.

Figure 5

Number of Dutch-born Dutch citizens per municipality, 2022



Source: own processing based on KSH (2022).

In contrast, in regions such as the Southern Great Plain and the southeastern part of Pest County, Dutch residents tend to be more centralized in specific locations. For instance, Csemő has 52 Dutch citizens out of a total population of 4,500 (KSH 2022). Similarly, a few other villages and towns have significant Dutch populations, but the surrounding areas have a minimal Dutch presence.

In Northern Hungary and the northern parts of Central Hungary, the Dutch population is more dispersed. Western and Central Transdanubia have relatively few Dutch residents, with notable clusters around the northern part of Lake Balaton and specific hotspots, such as Pápa, which has 23 Dutch citizens due to the presence of a NATO air base established in cooperation with the Dutch government. The Eastern part of the Northern Great Plain has a very small number of Dutch residents, with Debrecen, Hungary's second most populated city, housing only 15 Dutch citizens.

Approximately 40% of the municipalities in Southern Transdanubia and Pest have at least one Dutch resident. This figure decreased to 22% in the Southern Great Plain, 14% in Central Transdanubia, 13% in Northern Hungary, and approximately 10% in both Western Transdanubia and the Northern Great Plain. Overall, nearly 21% of Hungarian municipalities, excluding Budapest, had at least one Dutch-born citizen. This distribution indicates that the Dutch population in Hungary is widespread and not confined to specific urban centres.

Table 15

Ten Hungarian municipalities with the highest amount of Dutch-born Dutch citizens, 2021

	Municipality	Number of Dutch citizens	Share of population, %
1	Budapest	473	0.03
2	Csemő	52	1.16
3	Pécs	43	0.03
4	Almamellék	34	8.63
5	Tiszakécske	29	0.26
6	Tiszaszentimre	28	1.50
7	Pálmonostora	26	1.55
8	Kisberzseny	25	26.04
9	Pápa	23	0.08
10	Somogyhárságy	22	5.76

Source: own processing based on KSH (2022).

Discussion

The findings of this study have several significant implications and offer recommendations for further research and public policy.

First, this study underscores the need for greater attention to elderly and lifestyle migration, urging researchers to expand their focus beyond traditional north-to-south migration patterns. The findings suggest that a significant and growing proportion of Dutch citizens in Hungary have migrated not for higher wages, but to pursue a

lifestyle that may be unattainable or unaffordable in their home country, particularly given their age and low employment levels.

This trend is mirrored among other groups, such as Germans, Austrians, Belgians, and, to a lesser extent, Luxembourgers, who also migrate to Hungary as lifestyle migrants. By contrast, migrants from other EU-13 countries tend to move for economic reasons. At the same time, Hungarian retirees are increasingly migrating to countries such as Spain (Kaiser 2024), illustrating the complexity of migratory patterns and the need to avoid oversimplification when analysing such trends.

Second, the geographic distribution of Dutch citizens in Hungary presents an intriguing pattern. While EU-13 citizens and the broader foreign population are predominantly based in Budapest, Belgians, Germans, and Austrians, similar to the Dutch, tend to settle outside the capital. However, their spatial distribution differs: Austrians are concentrated in Western Transdanubia near the Austrian border, and Germans are most prevalent in towns surrounding Lake Balaton. By contrast, Dutch citizens, along with a smaller proportion of Belgians, are primarily located in villages south of Lake Balaton.

Various factors likely contribute to these patterns. For Germans, a longstanding tradition of travel to Lake Balaton, particularly among East Germans, is likely influential. Furthermore, the literature on Dutch lifestyle migration suggests that Dutch migrants seek silence and space, which is abundant in Southern Transdanubia while still offering proximity to the recreational facilities around Lake Balaton. Therefore, Dutch migrants in Hungary can be described as rural idyll seekers (Benson–O' Reilly 2009).

Affordability also appears to play a significant role. Many Dutch residents in Hungary are below retirement age but face unemployment, dependence on public benefits, and lower levels of education. Many are likely to retire early or be declared unfit for work, making them less affluent than traditional EU lifestyle migrants. It is likely that Dutch migrants cannot afford housing in the more desirable areas around Lake Balaton. Instead, they settle in nearby rural areas, close enough to enjoy the lake's appeal but far enough to maintain an affordable lifestyle. This strengthens the assumption that international retirement migration has become accessible to lower-status groups, who can only access lower-priced real estate markets in disadvantaged settlements. This trend has also been observed among newer German migrants in Hungary (Koós et al. 2024).

These findings highlight the evolution of lifestyle migration in Europe. It has transitioned from being primarily associated with affluent individuals relocating to popular destinations to encompassing a more diverse socio-economic group seeking affordable locations outside traditional hotspots. Further research is required to determine whether similar global trends are emerging.

Finally, the spatial distribution of the Dutch population in Hungary presents challenges for policymakers. This group predominantly migrates to Southern

Transdanubia, an economically underdeveloped region characterised by high levels of poverty and social exclusion (Dövényi 2021, Boros et al. 2021). The area is also marked by low economic activity and small villages with minimal infrastructure or basic services (Bajmócy et al. 2021, Dövényi 2021, Kocsis 2021).

While policymakers might view the arrival of immigrants from wealthier countries as an opportunity for regional development, potentially stimulating investments and revitalizing the local economy, the social and demographic profiles of these individuals suggest that their economic impact may be limited. Moreover, this type of migration could introduce negative effects, including rural gentrification, accelerated population aging, increased pressure on healthcare and public services, and potential disruptions to local cultural identities. Policymakers must carefully assess whether this migration aligns with regional development goals and devise strategies to manage these dynamics effectively, balancing the potential benefits with the possible challenges.

Conclusion

This study examines the complex nature of Western European migration to Central and Eastern Europe by focusing on the growing phenomenon of Dutch migration to Hungary. By analysing the demographic, social, and geographical aspects of Dutch citizens in Hungary in comparison with EU-13 citizens, Hungarian nationals, and the broader foreign population, this study enhances our understanding of migration to Hungary while shedding light on the evolving dynamics of international lifestyle migration.

First, this study demonstrates that Dutch migration to Hungary has changed significantly since the beginning of the century. In 2001, a typical Dutch migrant was young, highly educated, employed, and based in Budapest. In recent years, however, the average Dutch migrant has been older, less educated, unemployed, and reliant on public benefits, with a higher tendency to settle in rural areas. Geographically, Dutch citizens in Hungary are predominantly clustered in villages in Southern Transdanubia, particularly in Baranya County, where more than one in five Dutch citizens reside. Given the rural character of these villages, Dutch lifestyle migrants in Hungary can be classified as rural idyll seekers, according to Benson–O'Reilly (2009).

A second key finding is the distinct nature of Dutch migration trends compared to other reference groups. Dutch migrants are significantly older than other population groups, with over two-thirds aged 50 or older. Furthermore, they exhibit lower employment rates and a greater reliance on public benefits than both other foreign citizen and Hungarian nationals. Additionally, Dutch citizens in Hungary tend to have lower levels of education than other foreign residents and EU-13 nationals.

When examining individual nationalities within the EU-13 states, the social and demographic characteristics of Dutch citizens in Hungary closely align with those of

Belgians, Germans, Austrians, (and Luxembourgers). Thus, they can be collectively described as lifestyle migrants. Like the Dutch, citizens from these countries prefer to settle outside Budapest, in contrast to other foreign populations. However, the geographical distribution of these lifestyle migrants varies. Austrians predominantly settle near the Austrian border, whereas Germans are concentrated in towns around Lake Balaton, and Belgians are found both near and south of the lake. The prevalence of Dutch citizens in neglected, low-cost villages in Southern Transdanubia suggests that their socio-economic profiles do not enable them to move to traditional lifestyle migration destinations.

The growing presence of Dutch lifestyle migrants in Hungary, particularly in less traditional tourist destinations and disadvantaged rural areas, aligns with recent research indicating a broadening of lifestyle migration to include new social groups and destinations.

Unlike the affluent and privileged groups traditionally associated with lifestyle migration, newer lifestyle migrants appear to face economic limitations, suggesting that economic factors are increasingly intertwined with lifestyle choices. This shift challenges the conventional view of lifestyle migration as predominantly non-economic, highlighting its complex and multifaceted nature. These findings expand the scope of migration studies, highlighting the need for a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon. Further qualitative research is essential to explore in greater depth the motivations driving lifestyle migration to Hungary.

These findings also carry significant policy implications. In sending countries, the outflow of citizens reliant on public benefits may raise concerns about the sustainability of domestic welfare systems. In receiving countries, these findings suggest the need for a more targeted approach in leveraging lifestyle migration for economic development. Western European lifestyle migrants are not uniformly affluent, and their tendency to settle in disadvantaged, depopulating rural areas presents both opportunities and challenges.

While these migrants may contribute to regional revitalization, their lower economic status, combined with a lack of infrastructure and limited local experience in accommodating such populations, could limit their potential economic benefits. Moreover, these regions may be particularly vulnerable to issues such as rural gentrification and cultural tensions within communities. A careful balance of these dynamics is crucial for policymakers to maximize the benefits of lifestyle migration while mitigating its challenges.

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