

Budapest, 13 September, 2015

The world press is full with awful photos, videos and reports about the situation of refugees in Hungary. In the past weeks, thousands of refugees (young women, men, whole families with small children and grandparents, sometimes even pregnant women) flooded our borders.

By having realized that the Hungarian state has not provided any care outside the few official refugee camps, NGO's and Hungarian civilians started to organize unprecedented help actions. Thus, food, water, clothes were provided for refugees by NGO's and helpful civilians and some sort of shelter called "transit zone" was granted to them at the biggest railway stations in Budapest, where the refugees gathered while waiting to get aboard on trains to Austria and Germany. Unfortunately, while desperately needed no medical help was delivered by any of the official organisations. Therefore, only one or two enthusiastic colleagues at the border and at the "hot spots" assisted them.



Seeing the situation of the tired, emaciated, dehydrated refugees, at the beginning of August, as the only official medical organization, the Associations of Hungarian Primary Care Paediatricians decided to provide medical assistance.



The situation of the tired, emaciated, dehydrated refugees one could see, led to the decision by the Association of Hungarian Primary Care Paediatricians to provide medical assistance (of any sort), as early as the beginning of August. Having utilized our mailing list, we invited our members in the capital to participate. In a very short time, more than 60 volunteers (doctors, nurses, assistants) expressed their willingness to help, and therefore were recruited. We got a tent and some basic equipment from the Budapest Organization of Hungarian Red Cross, but we used mainly our own resources. The tent and the replacing two containers provided by the Baptist Charity workers were placed at one of the most frequented point at Budapest Western Railway Station, where we have daily evening and occasional morning consultations when trains with refugees (as they call themselves: "those, who are en route") arrive.





It turned out that we needed many more medicines than we initially thought. In particular, there was shortage of antibiotics, painkillers and bandage. Therefore, a call was published on Facebook for charity fundraising. This generous donation by civilians opened the way to support health care volunteers (sometimes working in other places of the country) to get the needed basic medical equipment such as drugs, bandage, disinfectants, rubber gloves, etc.

The main problems we have been facing so far are dehydrations, upper respiratory tract infections, diarrhoea, minor injuries and skin infections. Originally, we thought that mainly children will ask for our help, but it turned out that the ones who needed the most attention were young women and men. Fortunately, although only members of our association (primary care paediatricians) made the consultations at the very beginning, soon after resident doctors, as well as paediatric trainees, and specialists of all medical disciplines joined us (though only as individuals).

Medical associations from the US, the UK, Germany and France also expressed their willingness to help us. Unfortunately, the Hungarian law does not allow doctors without Hungarian registration to practice in our country. As a result, only equipment and money would be accepted from them.

Given the lack of a unified EU policy, the Hungarian government uses the immigrant situation for its own internal politics. People, in general, have no tolerance toward strange cultures, and (due to the falling democracy) all official organizations are afraid that by acting in a different way, therefore opposing governmental expectations, they may lose the financial support so far given.

The situation is fluid and changing every day. Are the authorities going to stop the immigration flow? Will the migrant mass avoid Budapest according to policy makers' wish? Are we going to see some official organisation going to take over our efforts?

Ferenc Kadar, Peter Altorjai