

Hungary NGO Report

We met two groups that are involved with the refugee crisis here in Hungary. One of the groups, Migszol, is a civil organization formed to alleviate the suffering of refugees coming through Szeged on their journeys into the European Union. They worked especially with refugees at the train station in Szeged and at the collection point outside the city. The other group is Metanoia, a theater group based in Szeged, who performed their 2013 play *Jégdoktrinák - Variációk a náci retorikára (Ice-Doctrines: Variations on Nazi Rhetoric)* for the New Faces group.

We met several people who volunteered with Migszol, including Márk Kékesi, who showed us the former school they used as a warehouse for the donated goods they gathered for refugees moving through the city. These included sleeping rolls, clothes, bottled water, and even children's toys. Before the border was closed, thousands of migrants moved through the city. Their coordinator and PR manager, Éva Eső Antal, explained that the first action of the group that would eventually become Migszol was to insist to the workers of the train station and the police to allow refugees to stay in the train station overnight in terrible weather. Seeing that official groups were doing so little for the refugees, the activists decided to form a group dedicated to helping in the long term, and volunteers and donations helped provide compassionate assistance. For the duration of the crisis, Migszol set up an aid station beside the train terminal where they distributed food, sandwiches, and necessary goods.

On a trip to the "transit zone", Márk also explained the current situation of refugees attempting to cross the border. Only five are allowed into the facility on the border every day, where they are forced to live indefinitely while their cases are reviewed. There is no transparency in the process by which the refugees are vetted; NGOs and EU organizations are not allowed entry. We were moved by the sight of the transit zone, patrolled by guards with military equipment and covered in barbed wire, where refugees are confined in shelters built from shipping containers. Though the construction of the camp makes it impossible to see in or out, the sound of voices and children playing reminded us of the invisible presence of refugees trapped between countries and uncertain about when or if they will leave.

While Migszol is ending their operations and donating what is left of their supplies to other charity groups, Metanoia faces the ideological crisis by juxtaposing contemporary ideas with fascist rhetoric. In Hungary, xenophobia and Islamophobia are spread on all levels of society, from the very top of the government down. Artistic director Andrea Erdély explained that they are influenced by Artaud's philosophy of the theater of cruelty, directly affecting the emotions of their audience. We were deeply moved by the play and the discussion of it, which included excerpts from speeches by Adolf Hitler and Ferenc Szálasi, as well as contemporary racist jokes and ultranationalist propaganda. Towards the end of the play, a quote from a historian insisted that the Holocaust in Hungary would not have been possible without the cooperation of so many Hungarians, and reminded us that silence in the face of atrocity is a form of collaboration.