Preface

It has been ten years since the world turned upside in Hungary, and due to a most fortunate constellation of political and economic forces, the unexpected happened: the Soviet occupation of the country, as well as the four-decade-long authoritarian rule of the communist party came to a sudden end in 1989 in a peaceful change of regimes. Although a certain economic and political thaw set in a few years before, Hungary set out on the journey of building a market economy in the years 1989-1990. The last ten years of transition produced a small group of winners and an ever-growing number of losers whose lives have come suffered all the negative consequences of Hungary’s transition to a market economy, namely unemployment, inflation, a drastic cutback in state care, and an increased competition in all facets of life.

Women’s issues in general, and the recognition of the need to analyze the status of women in Hungary from a systemic, multi-factorial perspective came to the forefront of sociological study already several years ago. However, while different studies have been conducted, no comprehensive study has been compiled yet on the impact of the regime change on the lives of women. Questions of what employment and career prospects women have in Hungary, or whether the situation of young mothers has improved over the years, or whether the practice of discrimination against women is still prevalent in Hungary are only several from the issues which merit scholarly research. Such issues become particularly exciting if analyzed through the looking glass of women themselves. How do women assess their own situation? Would they characterize the recent changes as positive or rather negative? Do they have the necessary strategy and tools to respond to challenges posed by the transition? But more importantly, what areas do they wish to see changes in, and what would they do to facilitate such changes?

With the financial support of the World Bank, we endeavored to fill the above gap through a survey conducted between May and September, 1999. We conducted a series of focus group surveys to collect the opinion of women about their family, labour, and public roles and status. We supplemented the findings with a few in-depth interviews, to obtain personal, indirect information upon which to base the entire research project. We assembled the focus groups in a way to cover the geographical differences, and age and socio-economic groups, of Hungary. We also established control groups of men to check results gained in the female focus groups. (Please refer to the Chapter describing the methodology for further details.)

We are more than positive that the research project yielded information of considerable value. We also profited a great deal from the project, and not just professionally, but mentally too. We wish to emphasize that most women we interviewed were extremely pleased for being offered an opportunity to participate in the project, for being able to disclose their opinions on these issues, and that they could do so in a group of interested individuals, often in a polemic fashion. The majority of our interview subjects rarely ever get an opportunity to discuss these issues in public as the relevant civil organizations do not organize forums of a similar nature.
We wish to thank the World Bank for financing this project. We also wish to express our gratitude to the social scientist Marnia Lazreg, a gender specialist at the World Bank, for the choice of topic and the invaluable comments she made on the research project.

We would also like to thank Ágnes Kőműves for summarizing the relevant Hungarian literature on women’s issues, and Szilárd Imre and Péter Éliás for contributing to the project. We could not have produced a study so rich in information and insight without the enthusiastic contribution of our moderators, Anita Balaton, Tibor Béres, Judit Dobák, Erzsébet Hetesi, Judit H. Kovács, Júlia Kovács, Kata Kovács, Ágnes Kőműves, Zsuzsa Laczkó, Klára Minya, Viktor Nagy, Judit Palotai, Anikó Soltész, Mrs Staskó Bea Szili, Laura Ungváry, and interviewers Anita Balaton, Csaba Baranyai, Péter Éliás, Szilárd Imre, Ágnes Kőműves, Zsuzsa Laczkó, Anikó Soltész, Gusztáv Ványai, Mrs Ványai Erika Tóth.

We wish to thank the coordinators for their heroic efforts to finish the interviews amidst the chaos and devastation caused by the floods.

Thanks for Martin Benedek for correct and understanding translation

We are very grateful to Teréz Laky and Ágnes Kőműves for their valuable advice and assistance in creating the final version of the project.

Thanks for the sponsorship of Béres Ltd. we were able to provide their products as small presents to the participants of the focus groups.

And last but not least, we wish to thank all those women and men who devoted so much of their time, told us their most personal views and stories of their lives to make this research project possible. Quoting their opinion on the matter, it would be great if this project was the beginning, not the end. The finished project brought up a number of questions which definitely merit further research, and indicated new ways which we ought to follow up in the framework of new projects.

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Director, Co-author of the project
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Project Manager, the editor of project
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CHANGE IN THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE PERIOD OF TRANSITION – FOCUS GROUP SURVEY, 1999

Objectives and locations of the focus group survey, main characteristics of the sample population

Commissioned by social scientist Marnia Lazreg of the World Bank, the SEED Foundation conducted a focus group survey on Hungarian men and women between June-July, 1999. The objective of the survey was to draw up a detailed assessment of the impact that the social changes of the transitional period had on women. The survey questions were created in a way to enable the interviewees to summarize and compare the problems of the past with those of the present, and expound on the joys and sorrows, new opportunities and expectations, as well as disillusionment and difficulties experienced in recent years.

The survey allows us to gain an insight into the personal lives of our interviewees through opinions which are often heavily charged emotionally, and reflect an intimate connection to the issue at hand. However, the focus groups –as a social science method of assessment- are not suitable to deduce general conclusions pertaining to the whole population, regions or age groups of Hungary.

As required by the World Bank contract, we conducted our surveys on 36 female focus, and 10 male control groups. We endeavoured to assemble groups of 10 in all parts of the country, yet were forced to settle for less participants in some areas - due to the holiday season, and the devastation caused by the summer floods. An additional difficulty was in reaching the planned minimum of ten people in each focus group that women with small children had to find a babysitter during the meetings, so they depended on the schedule of other family members, or friends. According to our data sources, a total of 449 individuals participated in our survey. Selecting the most appropriate sites for the survey, we endeavoured to represent the population of the Eastern and Western counties of Hungary, that of the capital and country towns, and of small towns and villages in equal proportions. In several cases we had one focus group individuals from one village, in other cases when it was impossible, from neighbouring villages. In the North-East of Hungary, an ailing industrial area badly affected by the collapse of the steel industry, we opted for the towns of Ózd, Miskolc and the neighbouring settlements of Kazinbarcika, Putnok and Arló; in the East of Hungary, we conducted our interviews in Nyíregyháza and Nyírtelek; in the South, we chose Békéscsaba and the surrounding settlements, extending the site of the survey to Szeged, the surrounding small settlements, and later to the town of Kalocsa and the village Szeremle too. The Transdanubian region of Hungary was represented in the survey sample by Zalaegerszeg, Türje, Szombathely and neighbouring settlements, as well as Veszprém and the villages of the Balaton Highlands. Budapest and a few neighbouring settlements in Pest county made up the (geographically) central part of the sample (see the attached map in Appendix A). On the basis of specific socio-economic variables, and within the three age groups of the survey, namely those of individuals aged 18-30,
31-54, and 55 and above, we created a number of focus groups for the survey. (Refer to Appendix B to review the List of Focus Groups.)

The educational qualifications, family status, labour market position, and regional breakdown of subjects of our survey see in the Tables of Appendix C. Appendix D shows tables tabulating the responses based on gender of the respondents.

As an addendum to the focus group surveys, we conducted 15 in-depth interviews, the edited and abbreviated versions of which are attached to this analysis.

The youngest of our interview subjects was 31 years old, the oldest 75. While the regime change of 1989 coincided with the crucial period of the former individual launching her career, it was no more than one of many landmark events in the life of the latter, a retired teacher. The average age of 49.2 years of interview subjects allowed us to venture quite far back in time, exploring problems (and the causes of problems) which the older generations encountered in their working life. One of the interview subject was a skilled worker, five others had middle-level qualifications, and the rest were all professionals. Every one of the interviewees spent time perfecting their skills since graduation: some learnt a new trade, others picked up a new language, while the rest obtained new degrees either out of a changed preference, or due to the uselessness of their first qualifications.

Three of the interview subjects were old age pensioners: a 60-year-old weaver, a 75-year-old teacher, and a civil servant who was still employed at age 63. The oldest member of the economically active category was a school-porter at 61 years of age. The chemical researcher/inventor (58) managed her own business, the entrepreneur (54) ran a training center as a family business, while the landscape-designer at 49, previously employed in an agricultural cooperative, managed her own farm. The group of teachers was represented by a 57-year-old teacher of children with speech impediments and a 33-year-old English teacher, although the sculptor/literary translator (53) had previously been employed as a teacher too. One of the two single interview subjects was a mechanical engineer (33), raising a daughter, and an economist (42) of Roma origin who was also the chairman of a foundation. The youngest interviewee at 31 years of age was a bank administrator. The other two members of the group of active interview subjects were the editor of a women’s magazine (55) and a political decision-maker working in the private sector (47).

Three interview subjects were divorced: the cause of divorce in the above cases being aggression and abuse in the relationship, or an affair with an old/new partner. Of all the interview subjects living in a married relationship, two women had remarried for the third time. Although one of them lost a husband first, both individuals blamed their multiple divorces on cultural/educational differences. Our interview subjects had 1-4 children. One individual reported having 4 children, while two others had 3 children. Apart from the mother of 4, none of the interview subjects, many of whom were brought up in families with many children, had more than 1-2 children.

The majority of interview subjects had already lost their jobs once in their career. This was either because they could not find a suitable job in their place of residence, or
because no employer would offer them (the artist) a job. Due to mass lay-offs at, and the privatization of, state companies in the last 10 years, quite a few of the interviewees became permanently unemployed, an unfortunate position which forced them to accept any job on offer. (This is how the mechanical engineer ended up working as a secretary.)

In the first chapter, we shall summarize those key changes which have affected the general status of women in Hungary since the regime change of 1989, employing Hungarian literature in the analysis. The time-sequential comparative analysis, based on the relevant literature, aims to explicate changes in women’s status in the labour market, their career opportunities, societal perceptions of the role and value of women as well as women’s position in the family.¹

Below, we shall attempt to summarize the key findings of the survey, interpreting the collected data by categories of gender, age and socio-economic status, urban-rural-regional division of answers and ethnicity.

Then we’ll introduce the most important findings of in-depth interviews. The last chapter contains the needs and recommendations of focus groups’ participants.

¹ Of all primary literature used in the analysis, we wish to acknowledge the following articles as we often quoted from them: Mária Frey, The status of women at the workplace and in the household [A Nők helyzete a munkahelyen és a háztartásban] and Women in the labour market [Nők a munkaerőpiaccon]; Teréz Laky, Processes shaping the demand and supply of the labour market [A munkaerőpiac keresletét és kínálatát alakító folyamatok]; Beáta Nagy, Careers female style [Karrier női módra] and Olga Tóth, Changes in family values and gender roles [A családi értékek és a nemi szerepek megváltozása]. Supplementing the data used in the primary literature, we also employed the latest data compiled by the Central Statistical Office (CSO) in our analysis, and added comments to the conclusions of the quoted articles where we deemed it necessary.
Chapter One: Economic and social changes in women’s status during the transition in Hungary

Of the total Hungarian population of 10 million, the proportion of women (52 percent) has always exceeded that of men in this century. Historically, women have undertaken jobs which reflected traditional gender roles, and the then existent state of development of the Hungarian economy: in 1900, 60 percent of the population worked in the agricultural sector, and 75 percent of women were considered economically inactive. The change over the next 30 years was equally marginal: in 1930, 70 percent of women were registered as economically inactive. The slow industrialization programs of the 1940s and the subsequent world war forced a lot of women to undertake wage labour, while the ambitious modernization programs of the 1950s, with their concomitant demand for extra labour and low wages, made even more women active wage-earners, a mass undertaking which the state supported by establishing a national network of nurseries and kindergartens. In 1910, the proportion of the economically active population, i.e. women aged 15-54 and men aged 15-59, amounted to 60.4 percent, rising to 71.3 and 80.4 percent by 1960 and 1980 respectively, only to fall to 78.1 and 67.5 percent by 1990 and 1994 respectively.

1. Women in the labour market

We shall attempt to summarize the changes that occurred in the status of women in the labour market, and changes that affected their career opportunities in the 1980s and 1990s by reflecting on changes that occurred in the size of the total population and labour force of Hungary, and the economic activity of women, and by outlining the general characteristics of the groups of employed, unemployed and economically inactive women.

1.1. The labour force by working age

Hungary had a total population of 10,710 thousand in 1980, a figure which fell by 335 thousand between 1980-1990, and by 200 thousand in the following 8 years.

The total number of people at working age fell slightly from 1980 to 1990 (6,173 thousand in 1980 and 5,957 thousand in 1990), and increased annually between 1990 and 1997 (6,137 thousand on 1 January 1998), a phenomenon partially explained by the fact that the group of youths reaching working age in the above period grew in size in comparison to the previous periods, and also because the retirement age of women was extended by one year in this decade. Corresponding to the above changes, the ratio of individuals at working age to the total population of Hungary fell from 57.6 percent in 1980 to 57.4 percent in 1990, and increased to 60.5 percent by 1998.

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2 In Hungary, as in virtually all other ex-socialist countries, women’s retirement age was lower than that in other European countries: women retired at the age of 55, and men at the age of 60. According to a 1996 Act of Government, the retirement age of both sexes shall gradually rise to 62 years of age, at a rate of one extra working year per every two years (e.g. the retirement age of women was 55 in 1996-1997, rising to 56 in 1998, while the retirement age of men increased to 60 in 1998).
One may discern similar trends in the group of working age women, yet the changes were of a considerably smaller scale. In comparison to the 1980 figure, the group of working age women decreased by 97 thousand by 1990, and increased by 121 thousand between 1990 and 1998. Hence, the ratio of women at working age to the total population shows slight changes too when expressed in percentage terms, namely 47.7 percent, 47.8 percent and 48.4 percent in the respective years of 1980, 1990 and 1998.

1.2. Female population and the labour force

In spite of the positive change in the group of working age women in the quoted periods, the Hungarian female labour force fell by 7 percentage points between 1980 and 1998, and by 3 percentage points between 1990 and 1998. The above negative changes occurred due to a drastic fall in the number of active female wage-earners outside the working age group, and an equally significant fall in the number of female pensioners employed in the labour market after their retirement.

On 1 January 1998, the ratio of female wage-earners outside the working age group to the total female labour force fell to (somewhat less than) 8 percent of the corresponding 1980 figure, and amounted to roughly 18 percent of the 1990 figure. This striking phenomenon may be explained by an increasing demand for young and highly qualified employees in an overall trend of decreasing demand for labour.

The number of female pensioners employed after retirement age on 1 January 1998 amounted to slightly more than one-third of the corresponding 1980 figure, and one-fourth of the 1990 figure.

The female labour force, 1990-1998
(thousand people)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total female labour force</th>
<th>Group of working age women</th>
<th>Women outside the working age group*</th>
<th>active wage-earners</th>
<th>employed pensioners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>3249.0</td>
<td>2947.9</td>
<td>156.3</td>
<td>144.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>3115.4</td>
<td>2849.6</td>
<td>65.7</td>
<td>200.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>3 118.7</td>
<td>2872.0</td>
<td>66.0</td>
<td>180.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>3077.6</td>
<td>2889.7</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>138.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>3051.0</td>
<td>2903.9</td>
<td>40.5</td>
<td>106.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>3030.0</td>
<td>2912.3</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>86.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>3020.5</td>
<td>2918.5</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>77.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>2999.9</td>
<td>2916.1</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>59.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>3045.1</td>
<td>2977.3</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>48.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>3034.2</td>
<td>2970.7</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>51.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*14 year-olds and women older than or 55 years old (56 from 1997).

1.3. Employment

3 Teréz Laky, Processes shaping the demand and supply of the labour market. Budapest. 1999.
Due to a gradual decline in the employment capacity of the national economy, the number of individuals employed in the economy has continuously fallen in relation to the total population. According to the balance of labour force published by the CSO, the number of people employed in 1990 and 1998 amounted to 242 thousand and 1 million 722 thousand less than the 1980 figure, respectively.

Of all individuals employed in the Hungarian national economy, women’s employment share of the total labour force fell from 44.7 percent in 1980 to 46.3 percent in 1990, increasing to 50.7 percent by 1992, then it started a course of gradual decline in subsequent years, falling to 2 percentage points short of the 1992 figure, and 6 percent shy of the 1992 maximum by 1998.

### Employment by sex, 1980-1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Individuals employed (thousand)</th>
<th>Individuals employed (percentage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>3026.6</td>
<td>2443.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>2809.6</td>
<td>2417.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>2414.5</td>
<td>2119.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>2093.6</td>
<td>1788.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>2082.4</td>
<td>1661.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>2089.6</td>
<td>1657.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


1.4. Changes in the economic activity of women at working age, 1986-1995

It is the comparison of data recorded by the Central Statistical Office, that of a national socio-demographic survey conducted in September 1986 which recorded data in a sample population of 0.45 percent of Hungary’s population, and a survey of Hungary’s labour force conducted in the second quarter of 1995 which make it possible to understand the changes that occurred in women’s economic activity in the ten year period between 1986 and 1995.

In the group of women aged 15 to 54, and not enrolled in full-time education, the proportion of active wage-earners decreased from 80.8 percent in 1986 to 61.1 percent in 1995.

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4 One has two key sources to gauge the economic activity of the population: a) the balance of labour force, and b) labour force surveys of the population. The balance of labour force demonstrates the economic activity of the population on 1 January of a given year, as regulated by relevant Hungarian legislation on employment.

5 Since 1992, quarterly labour force surveys of the Hungarian population have periodically reviewed the economic activity of the Hungarian labour force in sample populations of 24 thousand Hungarian households (numbering approximately 50 thousands individuals aged 15 to 74), using the method of oral interviews. In 1998, the sample population, used as the statistical basis of the surveys, grew by 33 percent, and the method of calculating the sample population changed too. Today, interview questions conform to ILO recommendations, using standardized terminology and methodology.

6 We consider active wage-earners all employed individuals aged 55 or below, pursuing paid activity, and drawing a regular income from such activities, and individuals aged 55 and over, not drawing an old age pension.
percent in 1995, while the proportion of inactive individuals and dependants increased twofold in the above period from 11.6 to 23.2 and 7.6 to 15.7 percent, respectively.

Of the inactive members of the above age bracket, the proportion of women on maternity leave grew from 8.1 to 12.2 percent, that of female pensioners increased from 3.5 to 9.2 percent, and the proportion of women claiming unemployment benefits amounted to 1.8 percent in 1995.

In 1986, 7.6 percent of working age women not enrolled in full-time education were dependants (i.e. provided for by someone else), a figure which grew to 15.7 percent by 1995, 3.7 percent of whom claimed income support or were considered unemployed dependants.

The age group-specific analysis of the economic activity of women aged 15 and over, and not enrolled in full-time education, indicates that the overall proportion of active wage-earners declined significantly in all the age groups investigated.

The age group of 50-54 year-olds seems most strongly implicated by the above phenomenon: it was in this category that the proportion of active wage-earners fell from 74.7 to 51.8 percent in the examined period as these individuals were pensioned off before the official retirement age. The ratio of pensioners to the group of working age women increased from 12.9 percent in 1986 to 35.5 percent in 1995, while that of dependants remained virtually unchanged at 12.4 and 12 percents at the two respective dates (with the proportion of unemployed individuals with no income of any sort amounting to 2.1 percent).

It was only half of all women aged 15 to 29 who were active wage-earners in the second quarter of 1995 in comparison to a figure of 71.1 percent in 1986. 1.9 percent of the above age group drew an unemployment allowance in 1995; the proportion of women on maternity leave increased from 21.5 to 25.4 percent; and the proportion of dependants grew threefold from 7 to 22.1 percent. 4.5 percent of all dependants in this age group were unemployed dependants.

In 1986, 85.3 percent of the 30-39 age group were active wage earners, while this figure fell to 65 percent by the second quarter of 1995. The proportion of women on maternity leave, as well as that of dependants grew twofold in this age group, from 7 to 15, and 5.9 to 14.5 percent, respectively. 4.3 percent of all dependants in this age group were unemployed. The proportion of individuals drawing an unemployment allowance was the highest in this age group at 2.1 percent.

In the group of women aged 40 to 49, the decline in the proportion of active wage-earners was the smallest of all, falling from 88.1 to 72.3 percent in the examined period. It may be of interest, however, that the proportion of women on maternity leave increased quite significantly in this age group too (from a figure of 0.4 percent in 1986 to 12.8 percent in 1995). The proportion of dependants (7.7 to 12.5 percent, of whom 3.2 percent were unemployed) and that of individuals drawing an unemployment allowance (1.7 percent) increased slightly in the quoted period, while the proportion of pensioners fell considerably from 3.8 to 0.7 percent.

pension from the state. The above group includes wage-earners employed full-time, private entrepreneurs, employees of business associations, helping family members, agricultural workers, even day-labourers.

below the age of 55 years of age -save people drawing disability pension-, and people aged 55 or over who are employed in the labour market.
The proportion of employed individuals in the group of women over 55 years of age was quite insignificant in 1986 at 4.3 percent, then it fell to a relatively lower level of 2.8 percent. In 1995, nine-tenths of women aged over 55 were entitled to an old age pension vis-à-vis the corresponding figure of 77 percent in 1986, i.e. the proportion of dependants in the over-55 age group fell to a third of its 1986 value by 1995.

Similar to other analyses, our investigation revealed that the phenomenon of open unemployment, unknown as yet in 1986, accounted for only one-third of the decline in the total number of active wage-earners in the examined period, while going on maternity leave and choosing (early) retirement constituted another two „escape routes” for women wishing to leave, or being forced out of, the labour market. 7

1.5. Characteristics of the employment of women in the 1990s

We used the labour force surveys of the CSO in our analysis of female employment in Hungary in the 1990s. In full compliance with the recommendations of the ILO, we considered every individual aged 15-74, who performed at least one hour’s paid labour in the week before the survey, a member of the labour force. In other words, we included individuals „temping” in the unorganized (second) economy in our analysis in addition to those on the payroll in the first economy.

### Number of people employed in the labour market, 1992-1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of people employed (thousand)</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>4082.7</td>
<td>2218.2</td>
<td>1964.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>3827.3</td>
<td>2077.3</td>
<td>1750.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>3751.5</td>
<td>2055.0</td>
<td>1696.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>3678.8</td>
<td>2049.6</td>
<td>1629.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>3648.1</td>
<td>2036.3</td>
<td>1611.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>3646.3</td>
<td>2043.5</td>
<td>1602.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>3697.7</td>
<td>2041.7</td>
<td>1656.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


According to data recorded in the above labour force survey, the gender-specific breakdown of employment follows a long-term trend in employment: the proportion of men in the labour force (55 percent) exceeds that of women while the proportion of working age women (52 percent) exceeds that of working age men in Hungary. This phenomenon is related to the temporary economic inactivity of women when going on maternity leave, and also the younger retirement age of women in Hungary. It is relatively rare for female OAPs in Hungary to seek or undertake employment, and if they do, they tend to find employment in the unorganized economy.

7 Mária Frey, The status of women at the workplace and in the household, Budapest, 1996.
Changes in sectors of employment

Proportional change affecting sectors of employment is a natural phenomenon. However, the proportional change of Hungarian sectors of employment has not come about in a process of organic development, but rather in the short period of collapse of the economic structure between 1988-1993. The new economic structure has been shaped by the general investment strategy of foreign capital flowing into Hungary after the collapse of the state socialist system, while the employment capacity of the services industry has been affected by near-full employment in the state-financed branches of industry.

The proportion of people employed in agriculture amounted to 19.3 percent in 1980, and 17.5 percent in 1990, and fell to 7.5 percent by 1998. The proportion of individuals employed in industry fell from 41.6 percent in 1980 to 36.1 percent in 1990, to 32.6 percent in 1995, rising again to 34.2 percent by 1998. The proportion of individuals employed in the services industry grew from a low of 39.1 percent in 1980 to 46.4 percent in 1990, to a high of 59.4 percent in 1994 only to fall to 58.3 percent in 1998.

We used the balance of labour force compiled by the CSO to explicate changes in the number and proportion of women employed in key branches of the Hungarian national economy. In the 1 January, 1998 balance, the CSO included women on maternity leave in its employment statistics, hence their inclusion in the data published below.

The employment of women by sectors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sectors</th>
<th>1 January 1990 thousand individuals</th>
<th>1 January 1997 thousand individuals</th>
<th>Proportion of women 1990</th>
<th>Proportion of women 1997</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>394.9</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>109.3</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>803.9</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>478.6</td>
<td>25.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>1462.3</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>1308.6</td>
<td>69.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2661.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>1896.5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CSO, 1994, 1997

The above table sheds some light on the main employment trends of the 1990s. We find the following trends of particular interest:

* the proportion of women employed in agriculture fell to its quarter in the above seven-year period, and the overall ratio of female agricultural employees to the total female population of wage-earners fell from 15 percent in 1990 to roughly 6 percent in 1997. This considerable decline in employment gains an explanation if one considers the structural

---

* According to a 1996 micro-census, an annual total of 90 days of agricultural work is undertaken by 248,000 OAPs in Hungary, a figure further inflated by the number of individuals who work in family businesses, and do not consider themselves „employed” in the traditional sense of the word.
transformation of the sector, the loss of some of its traditional external markets, and the concomitant drop in production and increased competition for jobs.

* Female employment in the industries fell by 5 percent in the examined period.

* While the productive branches show a trend of decline, the services industry demonstrates quite a healthy rate of expansion. The most significant employment boom occurred in the field of public administration and social security. The number of individuals employed in education and the social sector also grew in the above period, and given that three-fourths of all employees of the public sector are women, the above changes in the services industry were sufficient to improve the overall employment status of women in the labour market. In addition to the changes in the public sector, the only other sector showing a considerable female employment boom was the financial sector.

* Due to the relatively high proportion of women employed in the services sector, the gender-specific categories of employment differ quite significantly when viewed from the perspective of the employer’s type of association.³

### Breakdown of the labour force by mode of employment (percentage terms)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Proportion of women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employee</td>
<td>83.7</td>
<td>87.7</td>
<td>76.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of cooperative</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of business association</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneur</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assisting family member</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In 1997, 88 percent of men, and (only) 79 percent of women were employees of some sort. In the above six-year period, the number of members of cooperatives declined significantly, and not just amongst members of agricultural cooperatives. Between 1992 and 1997, the proportion of women employed as members of business associations fell by half, yielding a less than one-third female ratio of employment in the category of business associations. The above decline in employment was less significant in the case of men employed as members of business associations. The entrepreneurial spirit amongst women seems less vibrant in the late 1990s than in the earlier years of the decade given that the proportion of female entrepreneurs grew from 5.4 percent to a mere 6.7 percent in the examined period, while the corresponding

³ We derived the above conclusion from labour force data compiled by the CSO which must, however, be taken as no more than a rough estimate of employees’ opinion of their employers as the method of verbal interviewing tends to yield highly arbitrary results. What should be of interest is the general trend of change in the recorded data.
figure for men increased from 8.8 to 13.2 percent, reducing female involvement in the sector from 35 to 28.9 percent.\(^\text{10}\)

A recent survey of entrepreneurs and new micro-enterprises in Hungary\(^\text{11}\) found that a considerable number of micro-enterprises established in the post-socialist period were set up due to external factors. The loss of one’s job, and/or the desire to improve one’s dire financial position featured high amongst such external factors. This latter factor is borne out by the fact that a number of micro-enterprises set up in the above period operated on a part-time basis, furthermore, the majority of such part-time businesses were established by women, a fact which indicates that women were more reluctant to give up the relative financial safety of their employee status.

This faint disposition of women towards entrepreneurship gains a viable explanation if one considers the findings of the one and only survey on female entrepreneurship published recently.\(^\text{12}\) The majority of the 800 (self-employed) subjects of the survey operated their micro-enterprises without substantial capital, or using extremely meagre financial resources. The vast majority of subjects did have the relevant professional expertise necessary for the business but their entrepreneurial skills were somewhat lacking, so they relied instead on their personal network to jump-start the business. More than 40 percent of the businesses surveyed were either unprofitable, or produced a financial loss despite the fact that half of the female entrepreneurs worked an average of 8 or more hours per day in the business, and two-thirds of them were just as active in the household after setting up the business as before.

It is the 1994 CSO labour force survey, published in accordance with the Single System of Classification for Professions (SSCP) in 1994, which provides a realistic picture of the position of women in the hierarchy of the workplace: the further one descends along the hierarchy of positions at the workplace, the more women one will find amongst the incumbents of such positions.

**Breakdown of female employment by main categories of profession**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main categories of profession</th>
<th>1994 thousand persons</th>
<th>1994 percentage terms</th>
<th>proportion of women*</th>
<th>1998** thousand persons</th>
<th>1998** percentage terms</th>
<th>proportion of women*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legislators, public admin., NGO, business executives</td>
<td>88.7</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>77.9</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professions requiring independent use of higher ed.</td>
<td>217.2</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>56.7</td>
<td>242.8</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>57.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

\(^{10}\) Mária Frey: Women in the labour market, Budapest, 1997

\(^{11}\) Ágnes Czakó, Tibor Kuzci, György Lengyel, Agnes Vajda, Enterprises and entrepreneurs, Budapest, CSO, 1993

\(^{12}\) Ilona Gere, Female entrepreneurs in contemporary Hungarian society, SEED Foundation for Small Enterprise Economic Development, Budapest, 1997
Qualifications
Professions requiring use of other higher ed. Qualifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualifications</th>
<th>289.5</th>
<th>17.1</th>
<th>64.5</th>
<th>311.5</th>
<th>18.8</th>
<th>63.3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Office and admin. Professions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professions</th>
<th>290.7</th>
<th>17.1</th>
<th>91.2</th>
<th>236.0</th>
<th>14.3</th>
<th>92.5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Service-type professions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professions</th>
<th>293.4</th>
<th>17.3</th>
<th>56.7</th>
<th>306.1</th>
<th>18.5</th>
<th>55.2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Professions in agriculture/Forestry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professions</th>
<th>41.4</th>
<th>2.4</th>
<th>31.3</th>
<th>37.7</th>
<th>2.3</th>
<th>27.0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Professions in construction and other branches of industry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professions</th>
<th>181.7</th>
<th>10.7</th>
<th>21.3</th>
<th>173.4</th>
<th>10.5</th>
<th>20.7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Mechanics, drivers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professions</th>
<th>82.2</th>
<th>4.9</th>
<th>21.1</th>
<th>94.8</th>
<th>5.7</th>
<th>23.7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Professions not requiring specialist training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professions in the armed forces</th>
<th>205.6</th>
<th>12.1</th>
<th>57.1</th>
<th>170.4</th>
<th>10.3</th>
<th>55.1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Professions not requiring specialist training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professions</th>
<th>6.1</th>
<th>0.4</th>
<th>12.4</th>
<th>4.6</th>
<th>0.3</th>
<th>7.5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Professions in the armed forces

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professions</th>
<th>6.1</th>
<th>0.4</th>
<th>12.4</th>
<th>4.6</th>
<th>0.3</th>
<th>7.5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Professions in the armed forces

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total</th>
<th>1696.5</th>
<th>100.0</th>
<th>45.9</th>
<th>1655.2</th>
<th>100.1</th>
<th>44.8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>


* Proportion of women to the total labour force (individuals aged 15-74)

** According to the new SSCP system of classification

Note that the number of women employed in professions requiring a higher education qualifications increased considerably while the ratio of women to men in these two sub-categories remained virtually unchanged.

One may also discern the total „feminisation“ of office-related (secretarial) and administrative professions, furthermore, women constituted the majority in physical professions requiring no specialist qualifications.

The relatively unfavourable position of women in the profession-specific structure of employment derives lineally from the low earning power (and wages) of women in Hungary, a fact which has direct bearing on the (lower) level of unemployment benefit, sick pay and pension paid out to women. According to a study published in 1995 which surveyed the correlation between gender-specific earning and employment relations in the 1986-1994 period in Hungary, the income gap between men’s and women’s earnings decreased by 15 percent in the examined period, that is men’s income surplus fell from 35 percent in 1986 to 20 percent in 1994 (Kertesi, Köllö, 1995). Authors of the study had two explanations for the above phenomenon: one being the appreciation of white-collar professions which are obviously dominated by women, and the other referring to certain „ailing“ professions requiring little or no specialist training in which the wages of men dropped to the level of wages earned by women. The above two phenomena could well have reduced the income inequality between the two sexes by at least 20 percent had it not been for another two counter-factors. First, the income surplus of men employed in executive positions increased
quite considerably over the examined period of time, while men have also managed to improve their earning position *vis-à-vis* women in similar positions, and with matching qualifications in the more developed regions of Hungary.

According to labour force surveys published by the CSO, *the general decline in employment had a most dramatic effect on those with the lowest educational qualifications*. In 1980, half of all men, and 60 percent of all women employed had no more than primary education, ratios which fell to 33 and 40 percent, respectively by 1990. In a matter of seven years, the proportion of economically active men and women with no more than primary education fell to 20 and 25 percents, respectively.

In 1997, 60 percent of all women employed had secondary education, and 16 percent a higher education degree. The proportion of women with university/college education doubled between 1980 and 1997 as can be seen from the table below.

**Breakdown of active wage-earners by categories of education and sex**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 8 grades</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-8 grades</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>54.4</td>
<td>34.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school</td>
<td>41.3</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>51.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Univ. Degree</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Less than 8 grades of primary school
** 8 grades of primary school

All improvements in the education-type composition of employment ought to be attributed to a demographical shift which occurred in the examined period, and because people with basic education were either forced out of, or were unable to enter the labour market. If viewed in a different context, however, the general decline in employment had a positive result too insofar as the remaining labour force went through a qualitative change in terms of education.

Pressing the argument further, the unequal opportunities of men and women in taking up executive positions in Hungary cannot be traced back to the truism argued by many that men are still more educated in Hungary than women: from 1990 onwards, the proportion of women with higher education degrees exceeds that of men quite significantly. On the other hand, one finds enormous gender-related differences in qualifications when examining the breakdown of sexes by college vs. university education, or by academic disciplines. In 1997, women acquired 52.4 percent of university, and 64.9 percent of college degrees granted in Hungary. In light of the well-known fact that individuals with degrees in law, economics and engineering stand the best chance of succeeding to influential executive positions in the sphere of the economy, we used data in the above three academic disciplines to reveal gender-related anomalies between a university and a college education while ignoring statistics in the
medical, pharmaceutical, teaching, and social spheres for the simple reason that these sectors are clearly dominated by women.

**Proportion of women with university and college degrees (percentage terms)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic discipline</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>1993</th>
<th>1997</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>52.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>50.5</td>
<td>47.9</td>
<td>52.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public administration, law</td>
<td>80.7</td>
<td>61.6</td>
<td>74.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>71.7</td>
<td>66.1</td>
<td>66.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>28.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Specialist research has shown that macro-level equality in the education of men and women is not sufficient in itself to warrant equal career opportunities for members of the two sexes.

1.6. **Female unemployment**

**Registered unemployment**

According to official statistics, there was full employment in Hungary as late as the 1980s. Between 1990 and 1993, unemployment grew exponentially, a phenomenon starting to appear in statistics from the early 1990s onwards. After 1993-94, the trend reversed demonstrating a consistent fall in the rate of unemployment. Ever since the negative „climax“ in 1993-94, the number of officially registered unemployed individuals, and their proportion to the total labour force has fallen gradually. Viewing the scale of unemployment from a gender-specific perspective between 1990 and 1993, one finds a shocking 27-fold rise in the number of officially registered unemployed individuals in both male and female labour forces. While female unemployment rose to a staggering figure of 273,000 individuals by 1993 from a total of 10,000 in 1990, the overall number of unemployed women fell to 202.6 thousand individuals by 1998.

**Rate of unemployment, and number of unemployed individuals registered between 1990-1998**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 1 January</th>
<th>Number (thousand) of unemployed</th>
<th>Unemployment rate (percentage terms)</th>
<th>Proportion of women (percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>61.5</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>239.0</td>
<td>167.1</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Individuals not registered as unemployed

When compiling data for the balance of labour force, the CSO considered all those individuals aged 15-74 unemployed who did not have a job at the time of the survey. Technically, however, it is only individuals below retirement age who should be considered unemployed if they do not have a job, therefore the following data should be taken as information referring to unemployed individuals at working age.

Rate of unemployment, and number of unemployed individuals according to the CSO labour force survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 1 January</th>
<th>Number (thousand) of unemployed</th>
<th>Unemployment rate (percentage terms)</th>
<th>Proportion of women (percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>265.9</td>
<td>178.3</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>316.0</td>
<td>202.9</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>274.8</td>
<td>176.4</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>261.5</td>
<td>155.0</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>243.7</td>
<td>156.4</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>214.1</td>
<td>134.7</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>189.2</td>
<td>123.8</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The two data sources corroborate the conclusion that the rate of unemployment changed in the same direction for both sexes while preserving gender-related differences in unemployment in the examined period.

The permanently low rate of female unemployment in Hungary, a rate which consistently fell below the male unemployment rate, was used in communist propaganda to demonstrate the equal rank of the two sexes. In 1998, the female unemployment rate of 7 percent almost matched the male unemployment rate of 8.5 percent. With the exception of people aged 60 or over, the female rate of unemployment is lower than that of their male counterparts in all age groups.

The smaller proportion of women in the group of unemployed individuals springs partly from those structural changes which have recently transformed the

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13 According to recommendations made by the ILO, the Central Statistical Office considered all those individuals unemployed who were neither employed, nor on temporary leave from employment, and who, seeking employment actively, would have been able to start work in a matter of two weeks, at the time of the survey.
Hungarian employment structure. The employment branches showing the most dramatic signs of decline were also the ones that produced the highest rate of unemployment between 1990-1993, namely agriculture, the construction, metallurgy and metal-working industries, and also the engineering industry to a certain extent. The relative similarity of gender-specific unemployment rates in the year 1993 shows that the industrial decline of this ominous three-year period spared nobody: both sexes suffered to some extent. However, the proportion of women employed in the above industrial sectors was relatively low, hence the relatively lower rate of unemployment stemming from the collapse of the above industries. Meanwhile, the fields of public administration, education and health, i.e. sectors employing women primarily, saw no measures of mass work force reduction in the 1990-1993 period; indeed, some fields experienced a slight rise in the work force after 1990.

The favourable rate of female unemployment has another explanation, namely the relatively low level of female employment in Hungary. Although there are more women (4,059 thousand) than men (3,720 thousand) in the 15-74 age group, close to 56 percent of women, and only 40 percent of men were absent from the labour market in 1998.

It is all the more difficult for women to return to, or indeed enter, the labour market in Hungary because a key element of re-employment, i.e. part-time labour, is virtually non-existent in the Hungarian employment structure. The proportion of women working part-time was 2.3 percent in 1995, a figure roughly equivalent to that in 1995; in other words, a rise in unemployment was unaccompanied by a corresponding rise in part-time labour. In conjunction with the CSO, the Employment Research Institute of Hungary conducted a survey in 1993 to find out whether women employed full-time would settle for a part-time position if their wages were readjusted accordingly. Surprisingly, 20 percent of all interviewees answered in the affirmative. By 1995, the number of female employees ready to take up part-time positions fell by half, a curious phenomenon which probably stemmed from a significant drop in female employment and a dramatic decline in real income, which 88 percent of all interviewees quoted as the main reason for turning down an offer for a part-time position - should it ever came up.

However, the real difference between the employment practice of the two sexes did not manifest itself in the unemployment rate but rather in the correlation between employment and economic inactivity. Since 1993, the number of officially registered unemployed women dropped by 70 thousand while the total number of employed women declined by 100 thousand. A corresponding decline in the unemployment rate leads one to the conclusion that the individuals who left, or dropped out of, the labour market became economically inactive, rather than unemployed.

1.7. Economically inactive women

The stabilization of employment at a relatively low level in Hungary was accompanied by the dual phenomena of a gradual decline in the number of unemployed women.
individuals, and a dramatic rise in the number of inactive members of the labour force. Relying on the balance of labour force compiled by the CSO, we shall attempt to summarize those changes in the total size and gender-specific composition of the inactive part of the labour force which took place between 1990-1998.

### Number and gender-specific composition of the inactive part of the labour force (thousand)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People at working age</td>
<td>2849.6</td>
<td>2970.7</td>
<td>121.1</td>
<td>3107.2</td>
<td>3166.2</td>
<td>59.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economically active</td>
<td>2162.8</td>
<td>1860.0</td>
<td>(302.8)</td>
<td>2603.8</td>
<td>2351.0</td>
<td>(252.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economically inactive</td>
<td>686.8</td>
<td>1167.2</td>
<td>480.4</td>
<td>503.4</td>
<td>832.9</td>
<td>329.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of whom:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People on paid maternity leave</td>
<td>243.5</td>
<td>238.0</td>
<td>(5.5)</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>(0.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People claiming child support (gyet)</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>52.0</td>
<td>52.0</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>232.6</td>
<td>308.8</td>
<td>76.2</td>
<td>250.4</td>
<td>307.3</td>
<td>56.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OAPs</td>
<td>93.9</td>
<td>157.8</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>157.1</td>
<td>254.0</td>
<td>96.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other inactive indiv’s</td>
<td>116.8</td>
<td>410.6</td>
<td>293.8</td>
<td>97.4</td>
<td>270.6</td>
<td>173.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of inactive indiv’s (percentage)</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Due to processes outlined above, the ratio of economically inactive women to the total number of working age women increased from 24.1 to 39.3 percent in the 1990-1998 period.

Close to two-thirds of the above rise in economic inactivity stem from the fact that women who previously earned an income chose to become housewives. Another 16 percent of the above rise in economic activity may be attributed to further and higher education. The considerable rise in the number of women enrolled in full-time education may be traced back to the growing popularity of further and higher education courses, as well as the recent entry of populous generations into the labour market.

The rise in the number of working age pensioners is related to the growing popularity of early retirement pension packages. The 1993 Social Act introduced the institution of child support (gyermeknevelési támogatás), a new form of family support which reflects the post-socialist ideology of putting the mother before the working woman.

In 1998, 52 thousand people availed themselves of gyet, the new child support facility. Partly because of gyet, and due to a simultaneous decline in the number of births, the number of women going on paid maternity leave (gyes and gyed) declined by 2.3 percent in 1998.

2. Changes in societal perceptions of the value, and the social and family role of women
In this chapter, we shall outline those basic changes which took place in the societal perception of the value, and the social and family role of women in the post-socialist period of politico-economic transformation. We made use of statistics and data compiled by the CSO, two comparative studies (with timelines relevant to our analysis), the aforementioned study authored by Mária Frey, and a report by Olga Tóth.

Before embarking on the analysis, however, we wish to outline the statistical method we opted for to record and analyse those post-socialist societal changes which appeared relevant to our subject of analysis.

Changes in the structure of society

It was in the introduction that we first referred to the relevance of population change in Hungary. The ongoing population fall is the unfortunate product of ever-declining fertility and high mortality rates. The number of live births in 1997 broke the negative record set in post-Trianon Hungary (i.e. the period after 1920). Hand in hand with the considerable drop in birth rates goes the growing number of extra-marital births too. The proportion of extra-marital births was a mere 10 percent in 1987, 13 percent in 1990, 19 percent in 1994, rising to 25 percent in 1997. The decline in fertility rates seems related to the changing nature of family patterns preferred by the younger generations. The desire to marry seems to have declined considerably, while the average age of those married for the first time increased slightly, and preference for (non-marital) partnerships seems more widespread than in previous eras. After the new family protection act came into force in 1988, divorce rates fell by one-third until 1992 when they started rising again.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Single Men</th>
<th>Single Women</th>
<th>Married Men</th>
<th>Married Women</th>
<th>Widows Men</th>
<th>Widows Women</th>
<th>Divorced Men</th>
<th>Divorced Women</th>
<th>Total* Men</th>
<th>Total* Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>69.9</td>
<td>63.8</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>70.8</td>
<td>64.3</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>64.6</td>
<td>58.1</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>53.7</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* All data refer to men and women aged 15 or over.
Source: András Klinger, Population change in Hungary, Statistical Review, 1996

The growing number of marriages between 1970 and 1980, as well as the simultaneous drop in the number of singles indicate (at least until 1980) a growing preference for living in a partnership of wedlock, while the subsequent decade (with a growing number of singles and a considerable drop in the number of marriages) seems

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16 Mária Frey, The status of women at the workplace and in the household, Budapest, 1996
17 Olga Tóth, Change in family values and gender roles, TÁRKI, Budapest, 1994
to have reversed the trend. The proportion of widowers stayed virtually constant in the above period, but due to a rising male mortality rate in Hungary, the number of widows have also grown in recent years.

### Marriage and divorce in Hungary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marriages</td>
<td>80,331</td>
<td>66,405</td>
<td>46,905</td>
<td>45,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of which: re-marriages</td>
<td>23,506</td>
<td>18,478</td>
<td>13,420</td>
<td>13,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceased marriages</td>
<td>98,221</td>
<td>89,817</td>
<td>84,193</td>
<td>85,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Due to: death of a spouse divorce</td>
<td>70,424</td>
<td>64,929</td>
<td>59,201</td>
<td>59,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. Of divorces by every 1,000 marriages</td>
<td>27,797</td>
<td>24,888</td>
<td>24,992</td>
<td>25,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. Of divorces by every 1,000 weddings</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The declining trend of marrying, as well as the low numbers of marriages in the mid-late 1990s merit a complex explanation. The deferral of a first marriage is related, among other factors, to the societal acceptance of non-marital partnership relations, the explicit choice to stay single, which may be a function of the financial viability and desirability of staying unmarried, or even that of financial insecurity which forces one to follow a single lifestyle. The potential for re-marriages is compromised by the dwindling number of marriages in the first place, a declining disposition of divorcees to get married for a second time, and also by the regretful mortality rate of Hungarian males.

TÁRKI (a Hungarian Social Science Research Institute) conducted two surveys on citizens’ expectations of marriages and views on divorce in 1986 and 1994, using the returned questionnaires to compile data on the above questions.\(^\text{19}\)

Researchers at TÁRKI highlighted four key motives for marriage. Of interview answers stressing the value of marriage, TÁRKI listed the yearning for happiness, the desire to have children, and the desire for financial security as motives which appreciated most significantly in the perception of interview subjects between the two dates of the interview.

In both years, male subjects of the survey chose the statement „Individuals living a married life are happier than those who are single” as the most important reason to marry. Female opinions on the above matter varied, and only a small fraction of interviewees agreed with the statement. In other words, marriage is not necessarily a synonym for happiness for women, at least when compared to other types of partnership.

When asked about the fundamental goal of a marriage in 1994, a proportion of women significantly larger than in 1988 answered that „The ultimate goal of marriage [was] having children.” On the other hand, the proportion of those who agreed with the

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\(^{19}\) Olga Tóth, Change in family values and gender roles - a study based on a survey conducted on a sample population of 1500 individuals in the framework of the International Social Survey Program.
above statement in the age group most directly implicated by the question, namely the
group of women below the age of 37, had fallen quite considerably between the two
survey dates. Also, the higher the education, the less the interviewees in the above age
group agreed with the statement.

Financial security being the most important part of a marriage gained a roughly
equal level of endorsement from members of the two sexes. By 1994, however, the
condition of financial stability offered by marriages had become more appreciated, with
women placing more emphasis on this specific condition than men. The financial
stability aspect of marriages carried real weight for people with low levels of education
both in 1988 and 1994, while individuals of more education did not find this condition
as important in 1988 as they did in 1994. In 1988, for example, only 26 percent of men,
and 12 percent of women with higher education degrees found the financial stability
condition of importance. By 1994, close to 46 percent of men, and 43 percent of women
of the highest education thought of financial stability as a substantial reason to get
married. It was probably the rapid emergence of unemployment, and the simultaneous
fall in real income which made the above professionals realize the benefits of marriage
vis-à-vis the option of going it alone.

It was only one in ten women, and one in eight men who agreed with the
position that „no matter what the costs, one must get married.” Divorce being an
obvious strategy to resolve marital conflicts was agreed to by more than half of men and
women interviewed. Patching marriages up for the sake of the children was the position
taken by one-fourth of married women, and by one-third of men who had already had a
marriage.

The number of households grew from 3.7 to 3.9 million between 1980-1990,
and stayed unchanged in the 1990-1996 period. The above process was greatly enabled
by the gradual break-up of multi-generational households, and the emergence of
increasing numbers of „fragmented families” due to parents” divorce. The growing
number of OAPs; individuals drawing a disability pension, and individuals retiring at
an early age who maintained separate households, coupled with the increasing trend of
unemployment in the 1990s, yielded a large number of households with no
economically active household member.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>1980</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>1996</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Household with active wage-earner</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household with no active wage-earner</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of households</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The activity structure of households with active wage-earners has changed over
the years too, with less and less households having more than one active bread-winner.
While there were 180 active wage-earners for every 100 households in 1980, the
number of active wage-winners fell to 171 and 158 per 100 households in the respective
years of 1990 and 1996. While there was a total of 111 inactive wage-earners,
unemployed or dependant individuals for every 100 active wage-earners in 1980, the
The total of inactive individuals per every 100 bread-winners fell to 129 and 193 in the respective years of 1990 and 1996.

The relatively favourable status of women in the labour market, the economic decline well under way until the mid-1990s, the growing level of dependant-related obligations undertaken by individual households, as well as some other factors (unlisted here) exerted a significant impact on the general perception of female employment in Hungary.

In one context, views on female employment remained unchanged between 1986-1995 insofar as only one-fifth of all women supporting female employment affirmed the desirability of full-time female employment.

In 1986, 81 percent of all employed female interviewees agreed with the proposition that women should pursue wage-earning activities. Of the above group of women, 78 percent deemed a daily total of 4-6 working hours to be ideal, while 10 percent of them thought that working from home was ideal. In 1995, the answers of both employed interviewees, and those of all 2900 interviewees revealed that roughly 30 percent of both groups rejected the idea of female employment while two-thirds supported it. It was only 60 percent of those affirming female employment who deemed part-time employment the most suitable form of employment for women, a fact which aptly demonstrates the declining popularity of female part-time employment. The proportion of those who thought working from home was ideal nearly doubled in ten years, from 10 percent in 1986 to 18 percent in 1995.

In 1995, 88 percent of all employed female interviewees answered that they would continue working even if their financial status allowed them to stay at home. However, no surveys has determined yet the roots of the discrepancy between the opinions of those employed and the total population of the survey. It is merely a conjecture that those women were forced out of the labour market in the examined period who disdained the wage-earning activities of women, or their expulsion from the labour market may have precipitated a change in core values.

56 percent of all interviewed female employees answered that it was the welfare of their family which constituted for them the key motive for employment. Indeed, most interviewees referred to financial considerations as the primary reason for getting a job in 1986, yet they made up no more than one-third of all interview subjects at the time. Note, however, that due to the relatively higher proportion of individuals with further and higher educational qualifications in 1995, more than twice as many women (26 percent) named „loving their job” as a primary motive to stay employed (vis-à-vis a figure of 12 percent in 1986).

In 1986, every one in five employed interview subjects would have given up their jobs if their financial status had allowed it (vis-à-vis a ratio of one in ten in 1995). In both survey years, the majority of interviewees (75 percent in 1986, and 57 percent in 1995) stated that they would give up their jobs to spend more time with the children, and to manage the household. It may also be of interest that the proportion of women who wished to stay at home for the school years of their children increased from 3 to 25 percent between 1986-1995. 20

20 Mária Frey, The status of women at the workplace and in the household, Budapest, 1996
Endorsement of the 8-hour working day for women declined quite significantly between 1988-1994, as can be seen from the data of a survey mentioned before. Society, and women within society, find different parts of the family life cycle appropriate for women to take up employment. The number of people who found full-time female employment acceptable in the first phase of marriage (i.e. when there are no children in the household) increased considerably (to include three quarters of all interviewed men, and four-fifths of interviewed women) between 1998 and 1994.

In the case of mothers with children aged 6 or less, both sexes came to prefer women „to stay at home with the children” in the 1994 survey year. 60 percent of women in 1994, *vis-à-vis* a figure of 46.5 percent in 1988, favoured mothers with small children to stay at home. Both figures exceed the preferences expressed by men in the survey years. Age and educational qualifications also played a role in women’s preference on the above issue. More than half of the youngest interviewees, and three quarters of the oldest subjects would have preferred women to stay at home in the above scenario. For 56 percent of women with university qualifications, part-time employment was the most ideal solution for women with children aged 6 or less.

In both survey years, every other interviewee deemed a 4-6 hour working day appropriate for women having to look after children of school age. Between 1988-1994, the proportion of individuals affirming an 8-hour working day fell by 11 and 15 percent in the case of men and women, respectively, while the proportion of those preferring women to stay at home in the above scenario increased by matching amounts.

The comparison of attitudes expressed towards female employment, and the actual working hours of women (or the spouses of male interviewees) shows a striking discrepancy between behaviour deemed appropriate and reality. A significant portion of society entertains the nostalgic view of women staying at home, or working only part-time, while a considerable part of those who actually choose to stay at home entertain values which would warrant a radically different lifestyle.

According to 90 percent of all interviewees, female employment is easily justified by the excess income, a fact which aptly demonstrates that financial motives are extremely prevalent in women’s decision to work. The only group of people which does not really fit into the above framework is the group of individuals with university degrees. 20 percent of them are of the opinion that financial considerations do not constitute the primary motive for women to work, while the other 80 percent reckon that such considerations do really come first in women’s decision to work.

Another motive for female employment, namely acquired independence was considered more acceptable in 1994 than in 1988. (On a scale of one to five, the 1994 survey would feature a 2.9 rate of acceptance *vis-à-vis* a rate of 3.4 in 1988.)

The main argument of those who object to female employment is that “children under 6 will be the ones to suffer the negative consequences, should the mother decide to go back to work”. The above proposition became more widely accepted by 1994. Amongst people aged 18-27, 60 percent of women, and 47 percent of men agreed with the above proposition, and the older the age group, the more the interviewees agreed with the above statement. In the case of women, it is the level of education that has a significant bearing on preferences. Two-thirds of women with the lowest qualifications

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21 Olga Tóth, Change in family values and gender roles, TÁRKI, Budapest, 1994
(i.e. 8 or less grades of primary school), and only one-fifth of women with a university degree believe that a mother taking up employment must, by definition, be harmful to the development of children below the age of six. Also, one should note that 88 percent of 3-6 year-old children went to kindergarten in 1994, furthermore, the most recent statutory provisions prescribed the attendance of pre-school classes for all Hungarian 5 year-olds. Olga Tóth believes that we are witnessing a guilty conscience complex on a mass scale in Hungary, a curious phenomenon the causes and gradual emergence of which are still unclear to researchers.

The proportion of men conjecturing that not only children under 6 years of age, but the entire family would have to bear the „consequences” of a woman’s decision to work, declined from 77 percent in 1988 to 60 percent in 1994, vis-à-vis a rising trend (60 to 66 percent) in the opinion of those women who believed in the validity of the above statement. Reflecting on the answers from the perspective of education, one finds that four-fifths of men with only primary education affirmed the proposition in 1988, closely followed by the generally affirmative answers (69 percent) given by members of the most educated group (college and university degrees) in 1994. In the group of female interviewees, the proportion of those women with the highest educational qualifications who agreed with the statement fell while it increased in all other educational categories. 28 percent of university-educated, and 82 percent of primary school-educated women believe that the full-time employment of women has an adverse effect on family life. With advancing age, a growing number of men adopt the above view but it is primarily women (save the category of middle-aged men) who share the above view.

A growing number of people came to share the view that “albeit it is important to have a career, what women really desire is to establish a home and have children” by the 1994 survey year. More women (an average of 1.91) shared this view than men (average of 1.97) in 1994 while the exact opposite was true in 1988. Three-quarters of women aged 18-27, and two-thirds of men of the same age shared the above view.

Researchers analysing the findings of the 1988 International Social Survey Project came to the conclusion that the Hungarian public was rather conservative compared to its West-European and North-American counterparts. This statement is fully borne out by Hungarian men while the views of Hungarian women reflected the West-European mainstream. On the other hand, the findings of the 1994 survey indicated that the views of both men and women on female employment took a more conservative turn in the post-1988 period.

Changes in citizens’ living conditions and lifestyles have had a perceptible impact on, and are reflected in, the population’s general activities, time management skills and employment conditions. The amount of time one has for certain ends, as well as the way one manages it reflect upon one’s financial, cultural and social status in society. Based on two of the latest CSO surveys, namely one conducted in 1980 in a group of individuals aged 18-60, and another one carried out in 1993 in a group of individuals aged 18-69, one finds significant changes in the time management skills of the population.

The average amount of time spent on wage-earning activities declined from 367 minutes/day to 296 minutes/day in the case of men in the examined period, while the drop in the female group was more significant at 230 minutes/day to 163 minutes/day. Parallel to the above trend, the total amount of time spent working fell from 475 to 415
minutes, and from 518 to 464 minutes in the case of men and women, respectively. To put the above data into context, Hungarians spent more time on their physiological needs and leisure (e.g. watching television) than on paid work activities.
### Time management and indicators of women’s lifestyle in Hungary

#### Activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>1986</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>1993</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wage-earning activity</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>163</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of which:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>full-time job</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>126</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>supplementary income</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of which:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-agricultural work</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agricultural work</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household, providing for family</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>301</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>47</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time bound socially</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>573</td>
<td>477</td>
<td>511</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physiological needs</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>652</td>
<td>679</td>
<td>689</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading, studying</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to radio, music, etc.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting cultural and sports events</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social life</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watch TV</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>139</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor activities, fitness</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure time</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>241</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CSO, Standard of Living, 1988-1997

All socially bound time (i.e. full-time jobs, supplementary income activities, household chores, studying, transportation) decreased in the examined period due to a significant drop in the time spent on wage-earning activities after 1990. The sudden growth of unemployment, as well as the pensioning off of individuals before retirement age both added to the general drop in time spent on wage-earning activities, a phenomenon with further ramifications for the amount of time spent on transportation, i.e. commuting to and from work.

The division of labour between the sexes remained virtually unchanged in the examined period. Wage-earning and production constituted the core activities for men, activities which made up 77 and 71 percent of all time spent working in the years 1986 and 1993, respectively. The amount of time spent by women on household chores and the family exceeded that spent on paid work. The overall proportion of time spent doing household activities accounted for 56 and 65 percent of the total amount of time spent working by women in the respective years of 1986 and 1993.

The most momentous change of the last ten years is probably the restoration of day child-care activities as a family, indeed a household, chore. In households with a married couple in charge, the proportion of children looked after by one of the parents during the day increased from 37 to 58 percent in the examined period, while in households run by a single mother, the proportion of children looked after by the mother during the day grew from 19 to 50 percent. Between 1986-1995, the number of
children sent to nurseries, kindergartens or day-care centres from families with two
parents declined from 44 to 30 percent, while the number of babies sent to either of the
above institutions from families with a single parent fell from 53 to 33 parents in the
examined 10 year period. Such unfortunate changes may be traced back to the
deteriorating condition of the Hungarian labour market, the ever-falling number of
nurseries and other day-care institutions, as well as the rising costs of enrolling one”s
child in such institutions.

By 1995, the number of households hiring external labour for household chores
fell from 67.5 to 34.5 percent, and the proportion of households not wanting, or able, to
avail themselves of external assistance in the household chores grew from one to two-
thirds of all households.

The proportion of two-parent households which have traditionally had the
laundry done in a launderette shrank from a 1986 figure of 12 percent to 3 percent in
1995. Similarly, the number of one-parent families doing the laundry in a launderette
shrank to one-seventh of the 1986 figure, to 2.2 percent. In 1995, it was a mere 6.8
percent of single individuals who had the laundry done at an external facility vis-à-vis
four times as many individuals doing so in 1986. In light of the above figures, the 45
percent replacement condition of traditional washing machines with the newer,
automatic versions seems surprisingly low.

By 1995, the demand for dry-cleaning fell back to half of its previous (1986)
value. In 1995, 37 percent of families run by a married couple, 31 percent of single
mother-type families, and 23 percent of single individuals availed themselves of dry-
cleaning services.

The number of families with no family member eating out (i.e. away from
home) increased from 50 to 63 percent in the 1986-1995 period, and in parallel to the
above phenomenon, the proportion of families to prepare hot food at least once a day
increased from 59 to 71 percent. Related to the growing trend of dining in, and cost-
saving methods adopted by large numbers of families, is the dynamic growth in the
acquisition of freezers by families (the number of households with a freezer grew from
13 to 70 percent in the examined 10 year period). Roughly one-fourths of all
households acquired a microwave oven by 1995, a product which only appeared in the
consumer market in the late 1980s.

Only a small fraction, namely 3.5 and 3.6 percent of families entrusted the
chores of cleaning the flat, grocery-shopping, and the home delivery of food to external
labour in the years 1986 and 1995, respectively.

Data on the changing division of labour within the Hungarian household,
extracted from the time balance surveys of the CSO, indicate that the amount of time
spent on wage-earning/economically productive activities declined from 60 to 40
percent while that spent on household chores fell from 52 to 48 percent in the examined
10 year period. Men seem to have used the time thus spared with their children, hence
the significant rise in the daily amount of time spent by fathers bringing up their
children. However, the amount of time mothers spent with their children still exceeded
threefold the time fathers spent with their offsprings in 1993.

Women seem to have spent half of their spare time on household chores, while
men devoted only one-fifth of spare time to it: in other words, the household is still a
stronghold of women in Hungary. It was only the group of economically inactive
women at working age for whom an increase in leisure time became a reality.
In summary, it appears safe to conclude that the socio-economic changes of the last decade yielded a considerable number of changes for the adult, and particularly for the adult female, population of Hungary. Hungary is not a particularly rich country. Hungarian GDP per capita is one-third of the corresponding Irish figure, and one-eighth of that of neighbouring Austria while the purchasing power of Hungarian consumers is not that much weaker than that of their European counterparts. (Hungarian GDP increased from 100 percent in 1960 to 168 percent in 1970, 273 in 1980 and 306 percent in 1990, falling to 259 percent in 1993, 275 percent in 1996 and 288 percent of the 1960 figure in 1997.) The failing economic performance of the national economy, coupled with a strict, yet all the more volatile economic environment, produced unfavourable changes in the employment and living standards of the working population. Close to 1.5 million jobs were made redundant in the early 1990s. The majority of individuals who lost their jobs were male; less women became unemployed in this period due to the idiosyncratic conditions of female employment mentioned above. A large proportion of the female labour force left the labour market (e.g. there are more women choosing higher education and child care today than those who choose to escape from the labour market by retiring before retirement age) while some returned to the family. Naturally, the conservative turn which the social perception of women’s value and gender role in society took in the past decade cannot be divorced from the above-mentioned trends. Likewise, such societal perceptions cannot be separated from recent ideologies which put the motherly capacity of ladies before the working woman.
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Chapter Two: findings of focus group survey

I. Preamble

The Hungary of the state-socialist period, a state pursuing policies of central planning, was able to offer existential security to most of its citizens. Everyone was guaranteed a job, indeed, people were made to work by the state. The wages earned by employees of the state allowed a moderate lifestyle, and one which covered all basic necessities. However, the ordinary citizen had no opportunity to break away from the rest of society, either in terms of career progress, or accumulating the kind of wealth which would have been considered significant even in capitalist societies. The state-socialist period in Hungary was characterized by a demand-dominated market. Due to extraordinarily high demand, one had to wait 5-7 years to be able to purchase a Trabant, the simplistic, yet extremely popular motorcar produced in East Germany. On the other hand, practically all citizens could afford to buy a Trabant because of its highly subsidized price, along with most other consumer goods which the state subsidized in the state-socialist period. Heavy interference in market mechanisms pervaded the labour market too as the state, bound by its pledge of full employment, provided employment to all of its citizens, an unfortunate undertaking inevitably accompanied by the phenomenon of unemployment within the workplace (Kornai, Pető-Szakács). The above state policy made people feel secure about their long-term employment and existential prospects. The crime rate under state-socialism was significantly lower than that today due to a large and all-pervasive police force (with licences well beyond their current authority), and the Workers” Militia which played quite a significant role in law enforcement. All in all, one may argue that citizens lived a peaceful and secure life - both in terms of personal finances and public safety.

In 1989, with the onset of Hungary’s transition to a market economy, citizens began to experience the negative sides of state socialism. In parallel to the transformation of the economy, citizens came to experience the negative side-effects of the transitions, such as inflation, unemployment, and the very status of women and families changed in Hungary too.

Hungarian society was not ready to handle such immense changes, hence the immediate shock experienced by most members of society, a shock which left a lasting existential imprint on the lives of these individuals. The picture becomes more varied if one considers that the relative welfare of the 1980s came about at the price of chronic and ever-increasing indebtedness, a process which was never disclosed to the public. It was the unfortunate fact of indebtedness which eventually lead to the collapse of the economy in the late 1980s, precipitating the fundamental transformation of the political setup too.

II. Social problems affecting women before and after 1989

22 Citizens without a job were considered vagrants, a menace to society, facing possible prison sentences for their lack of employment.
First, we asked members of the focus groups to talk about problems affecting women in the period before 1989. As a grave violation of basic civil rights, interviewees mentioned the lack of freedom to travel, to set up businesses, and express their opinion in public on issues of outstanding political importance. Religious people mentioned the lack of religious freedom during state-socialism, an obvious concomitant of the atheistic stance the socialist party-state took on religious issues. In everyday life, active churchgoers often suffered a setback in their educational or professional career if the party apparatus found out their religious inclination. In general, it was the urban professionals and entrepreneurs who referred to the lack of freedom and basic liberties as a most salient shortcoming of the state-socialist regime.

The majority of survey participants remembered the positive aspects of socialism, namely the advantages of full employment and existential security, the fact that one’s wages made it possible to live a moderate but decent lifestyle, and that “the pace of life was not half as crazy as it is today”. Interesting enough, a few individuals who recently lost their jobs regretted having to work under the previous regime. (Oddly enough, those who subscribed to this view were unemployed at the time of the survey.) Many people mentioned what a significant difference it made to have a job to go back to after being away on maternity leave. The sense of existential security was further strengthened by the fact that the state and employers operated a number of day nurseries and kindergartens, and that people could rely on the house-construction program of the state. Education was free, and people could afford to buy textbooks for their children due to a state-subsidized price.

The majority of interviewees - without respect to sex - had positive memories of the pre-1989 era, a fact which, in most cases, seemed unrelated to the social status of the interviewee. We found a considerable difference between views held by rural and urban entrepreneurs: while members of the former group thought of the previous era with great affection, urban entrepreneurs vocalized the view that the previous regime denied them the chance to have a proper career, or establish private enterprises. The professionals interviewed, including those starting their careers, tended to have a very explicit and less favourable view of life in the state-socialist era. The lack of basic civil liberties, and the fact that women earned less than men even in the egalitarian state-socialist period were two flaws of the system that most professionals condemned. Although women performing physical labour also referred to the above issue as a problem, they (along with all other socio-economic groups) mentioned the positive aspects of state-socialism only. Male interview subjects reported similar experiences too. It may also be of considerable interest that virtually all male focus groups reported the privileged treatment of men at the workplace, a fact also reflected in wages.

All survey subjects agreed that women faced the special problem of having to excel on two fronts simultaneously: at the workplace and at home and the significance of this phenomenon was recognized by men too. They also emphasized the fact they have made efforts to change the above state of affairs. In effect, this dual role signifies practical terms, this often implied a schedule of returning home after an 8-10 hour working day to do the house chores and look after the children. This is what it was like before the regime change but it has become progressively worse since 1989, most
women agreed. If viewed in function of age and the type of settlement that interviewees came from, one may also note characteristic differences in opinion in the female focus groups. Many younger women voiced the following opinion: “We have undertaken a great many [social] roles which men had performed before, but we may not want to do them any longer.” Many of the above young group of women believed that the traditional division of labour was most desirable, i.e. a situation where the male breadwinner provided for the family, and the housewife ran the household and looked after children. Considering that even a few years ago most young women were positively optimistic about their career prospects, it would be most interesting to find out what factors were responsible for their growing preference for the traditional housewife role of the woman *vis-à-vis* excelling in the labour market. On the basis of answers provided to questions of the survey, one may venture to argue that this is all a consequence of the pervasive perception shared by women that they have no viable alternative to the traditional social division of labour. Verifying this hypothesis would require an additional research.

The older generations think of the traditional family model with great affection. The social pattern they saw in their families in the interwar period was that it was easier to lead a family life based on the traditional division of labour - the man provided for the family, and the woman looked after the household and children.

Curiously enough, it was mainly the middle-aged subjects of our surveys, i.e. individuals aged 31-55, who expressed disapproval of the above family model. Such opinions probably stem from the fact that middle-aged women are the ones actually implicated by the above issue, i.e. they are the ones who are currently bringing up children.

Women from the countryside, and particularly from small villages, report that their immediate environment, their families and husbands expect them to perform the role of the mother, and not that of a working woman – it was not confirmed by the answers of the majority of men interviewed from villages. Female employment to them is a necessary "evil" due to its negative financial implications, an opinion which led us to the conclusion that the traditional perception of women as housewives was still reasonably wide-spread in rural areas of Hungary. As it was formulated by men as well.

Many interviewees contrast the problems of the present with the supremacy of the previous era. The following is a selection of answers given by our interview subjects:

- "A pram cost 3,000 HUF before, now it costs 30,000."  
- "Before, we were able to plan ahead because our jobs were safe."

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23 Answering this question is beyond the scope of this analysis, yet it would merit an entire research project.

24 Statistically, women decide to have children at a later age than in previous eras. On the other hand, children often remain dependent on their parents, and stay in the parental household until age 25-26.

25 Pursuant to a 1998 agreement drawn up by the government after negotiations with the Interest Reconciliation Council, the minimum gross wage in Hungary is 22,500 HUF per month.
• "It is difficult for young people to establish a family today. There is no guarantee that they will have the means to bring up their children properly. There are no jobs today - before, you would have earned a prison sentence for not having a job."
• "There were no problems of any kind before, indeed, things looked quite rosy."
• "There were lots of jobs before: we were able to get a job with basic education, and if we did not like it, we would quit and get another one."
• "We did have the means to bring up children, but we would not today."

According to most interviewees, the problems of the present had an economic root. Our survey subjects found current real wages extremely low, especially in light of the fact that they now had to work more hours to earn as much as in the previous era. The relationship between employment and gender is probably more contentious today than before. Women are still paid less than men for equal amount of labour, and the chances of women with children to find employment are close to nil as employers tend to regard them as unreliable:

"Just like other employers, I shall not employ a woman in her twenties because, due to the high probability of her having a child, I will not be able to rely on her as fix labour-power. This is not being unfair to her; it is pure economic rationality," remarked a female executive we interviewed.

Another interview subject put it somewhat differently when she remarked that "this was one sure way of the employer cutting free from the consequences of employees’ motherhood." Even economically active women over 55 years of age reported that they preferred to stay at home with the grandchildren just to enable their children to find employment in the labour market. Men seemed fully aware of, and also described those unique problems which women faced in the labour market (e.g. issues of motherhood, age, etc.).

A few young female interviewees and a male focus group referred to sexual harassment as a unique problem faced by women in the labour market, but the overall proportion of those who mentioned sexual harassment as a definite problem at the workplace was insignificant.

The above interview subjects found it extremely difficult to handle and resolve problems of this nature as it would have put their careers at risk. Many survey subjects reported that employers were less keen to employ women above 35 for they considered them less attractive, and because (this is the line employers emphasized) they lost their practical experience by this age. On the other hand, employers may be equally unenthusiastic about employing middle-aged women for they might quit work to spend time with their grandchildren. We also interviewed a few individuals who believed that women, especially at older age, were less flexible than men.

26 Women must have experienced sexual harassment at the workplace in the state-socialist period too, yet it was exposed media attention which made it one of the „hot issues“ of the day. Many interview subjects specifically mentioned the impact the media played in making this issue public.
All the above criticisms apply nationally, yet the lack of infrastructure in the countryside (i.e. high costs of travel, distant educational establishments) may render the above problems even more serious in rural areas of Hungary. Furthermore, it is generally true that there are less jobs to be had in rural areas of Hungary. After the disintegration of agricultural cooperatives, which in many rural areas employed the entire local population, many people have been thrown into a hopeless situation with no prospect for employment. For them, „forced enterprising” was the only way out of a desperate situation. Such enterprises were most often doomed to failure considering the dangerously low mechanization and efficiency of agricultural production in Hungarian cooperatives (which provided the employment background for the above enterprises).\(^{27}\)

In the course of the post-socialist privatization and compensation process, most people acquired plots of land not large enough for efficient agricultural production. We found that only a small fraction of our interview subjects were actually affected by the privatization-compensation process. The negative experience of nationalization and collectivization under state-socialism made most current land-owners wary of setting up new agricultural cooperatives, yet it is precisely the lack of such cooperatives which render production ineffective on many small farms in Hungary.

Inflation and unemployment were two other grave economic problems which many survey subjects mentioned. A few individuals reckoned that: „forágn products have flooded Hungarian shops with prices so high that ordinary Hungarians cannot afford them.” On the other hand, many interviewees believed, the century-old social prejudices were as rampant as ever. Younger individuals put it as „the continuation of a patriarchal, male-dominated society.” This is partly to blame for the lack of respect that women get in Hungarian society. One should think no further than the pervasive prejudice against female managers or car-drivers.\(^{28}\) (Olga Tóth, Changes in family and gender values)

In conclusion, we may say that adjusting to the numerous changes brought on by the change in the political system has not been and still is not easy for most of the respondents. The decrease in the number of jobs, the appearance of unemployment, the radical modifications of the conditions of employment – the cessation of obligatory employment, the emphasis on the need for smart-looking, trained employees speaking foreign languages and being continuously available – it was only qualified young professionals and female managers of all those questioned that these factors did not pose an obstacle for.

According to the opinion of young débutante professionals, based on the experiences of familiars and friends, the “world opened” in the nineties, and, in comparison with the previous generations, new horizons opened up via the achieved liberties and available possibilities. Woman managers, as compared to the previous decade, have attained significantly better status and satisfaction because of better advancement possibilities, realized careers, acknowledged and finally adequately compensated, responsible work.

\(^{27}\) The number of people employed in agriculture in European Union countries is approximately half the Hungarian figure.

\(^{28}\) More is to follow on social prejudices against women in the „Family division of labour” chapter.
The valuation of the situation of women today as compared to 1989 is influenced by the fact that most respondents felt the hardships that sprung from the economic changes and growing inflation on their own skin and in their environment every day. The decrease in the amount of and the changes in the structure of state subsidies, the decrease of the real income, the fear of unemployment, the narrowing capacities of the social and child-care establishments, etc. and, above all, the unpredictable, simultaneous and rapid changes have generated a feeling of constant instability in the participants of the focus group. It can be accepted as a uniform opinion that the changes in the political system have not changed the situation of women in the sense that they have to hold the fort at home as well as in the workplace. Several respondents summarized the social effects of the political and economic changes by saying “Whoever was poor before, still is”. As for women’s role in public life, they feel their possibilities have not changed since the 1980’s.

Most respondents underlined, as positive aspects of the changes of the past 10 years, the changes experienced in the field of education and continued education. The widening of available training opportunities, the liberalization of participation, the appearance of services presented on a market basis – in spite of the economic burden on the participants – is felt to be an improvement in the situation by a large fraction of the respondents. According to many of them, an improvement in the situation of women may be felt in several areas, but the general opinion is that those women are able to profit from the benefits of the change in the political system (and the scale ranges from a wider supply of consumer goods to better self-realization) who are highly qualified, are able to change and have been able to make use of the changes and live in good circumstances.

III. Specific obstacles and sources of tension

1. Labour market constraints

When reviewing the above list of problems, one learns that it is primarily the labour market that women are at a disadvantage in. Employers have refused to employ women due to the age, number, or even the mere existence of their children. We have mentioned before that the employer takes on a real responsibility employing a mother as she may often be away from work (e.g. child is sick, school meeting, etc.). Such problems seem to be age-specific, and affect women with children only, but everyone – including men - seems to be aware of them (regardless of age or settlement type). Indeed, in job interviews, employers often ask the job-seeker whether she has, or is planning to have, children. Answering the above question in the affirmative may ruin the chances of the job-seeker quite significantly.

Our survey subjects also mentioned that attractive looks often made the decisive difference in the employer’s decision to hire someone, while having a less attractive appearance often compromised the job-seeker’s employment potentials. Likewise, age was also a decisive factor in employment decisions. Younger and female employees tended to get paid less than their older and male counterparts. Interesting enough, employers preferred to hire younger people, i.e. individuals below 35, despite the fact that members of this age group were the most likely candidates to go on maternity
leave. This fortunate fact may well be a function of employers’ belief that they can easily and quickly replace employees on maternity leave. Above the age of 35, however, women found it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to get a job (even if their children were older) because employers preferred the cheaper and more qualified young candidates for the job:29 individuals more able to take on a heavy workload in a flexible and innovative manner.

"On a personal level, I find the regulation that mothers of three children are entitled to seven days off work30 quite admirable, but as an employer, I would have to find someone to replace the mother taking the day off, and deal with the extra cost and overtime implications such a move may cause," remarked an employer we interviewed.

In Hungarian practice, female employees tend to turn to their mothers for help with child-minding just to be able to keep up with the competitive demands posed by employers, because they have not got the financial means to hire a helper.

On the basis of experiences of our interview subjects in the state-socialist period, it was a lot easier for mothers to take a few days off work when a child was ill, our survey subjects reported. "As a mother of three, nobody will employ me. Employers will tell me they do not need half an employee." Finally, our interviewees mentioned the disadvantages female commuters suffer: "If the employer has a choice, (s)he will employ someone from [the city of] Szeged, rather than buy a monthly pass for a commuter from a suburb." This, of course, applies to men, too. Obviously, the same applies to male commuters. A female employee summed up the above situation in the following words:

Employers seem to have no consideration for women bringing up children. I mean women are still held responsible for bringing up a child, aren’t they? Meanwhile, all ads in the job section of the paper insinuate that women above a certain age shouldn’t even bother to apply, and even if the ad carries no explicit warning, the employer will politely inform you so in the job interview. Although age limits may not be specified in the ad, the boss cannot rely on the mother of a young child as the child may fall ill at any time, and it won’t be the father to take the day off. Indeed, the boss’ rationale is quite understandable, I mean production must go on no matter what. Then again, one ought to pay more respect to higher societal values such as bringing up a child. With the government and media lamenting the dramatic population fall, and the growing number of OAPs, shouldn’t we consider children a vital economic interest? An economic interest on the national level, and not on that of the firm.

29 The average level of educational qualifications of Hungarian employees has been rising since the early 1990s, a fact obviously related to the higher level qualifications young job-seekers had when they entered the labour market.
30 Temporary leave for sick children implies that mothers may take a few days off work (every year), citing the illness of their children for their temporary absence. Such sick days do, however, reduce the number of days they may take off for holidays.
Interchangeable knowledge improves one’s chances of finding employment. This is, indeed, why we found it promising that most of our interview subjects deemed the opportunities for training/further training equal for both sexes. However, the dual role of having to excel at both the workplace and at home put women at a definite disadvantage over men on the training front too. Many survey subjects lamented that their current workload made it impossible for them to enroll in (further) training courses. From the perspective of employment prospects, we found those young women who had a baby before finishing their studies to be in the most difficult situation as it would take them an enormous amount of effort to return to school to finish their studies. The vast majority of them did not think further training or education would be possible for them too. "I went to high school in vain: I have no money, so I can’t go on to higher education. Even if had money though, I would not know what to do with my children while I study." Many survey subjects approached the issue of education and training from the perspective of money, finding them too costly. Young women at the beginning of their career found their employment chances equal to those of men after graduation, but they deemed the costs of education too high.

Many interview subjects reported that their employers offered them no opportunities for further training, and that even if the employee found such an opportunity, the employer would not support it. (Those who had a job before 1989 know that this phenomenon constitutes another instance of regression in comparison to the state-socialist period.)

"After I settled into my first job, my employer let me take a few days off to sit my exams in the first year of my employment. Later he told me to use up my holiday leave for the exams. Employers can easily do this people as there are 20-30 people on the waiting list for a job."

Employers may find it a risky, economically irrational investment to finance the training and education of women who may later quit their jobs when having a baby. However, one would need further evidence to substantiate the above hypothesis. Many economically active women over the age of 55 believe that the younger generations have better employment and training chances than before. However, they do not think that such employment and training opportunities are available to them too, or that their age is the right age to go back into education or training. Many survey subjects, but mainly those with basic education or unemployed, voiced the opinion that "there was no point in going back to education as there were no jobs to be had." Unemployed subjects of the survey reported that Job Centres supported the acquisition of skills which would not earn them a job anyway. Furthermore, "one had to be officially registered as unemployed for three months to get state support" (i.e. for unemployment benefits) 31. Another interviewee informed us that:

the Job Center would only award state support to individuals already unemployed. If you chose a trade, and found a prospective employer who

31 This was the case for people rendered unemployed at the start of their career.
would offer you a job, the Job Centre\textsuperscript{32} would still refuse to give you any support. Having the means to finance your training is the only option available, otherwise the Job Centre will tell you to take a number and get in line, then inform you that the only trade available is shoe-uppers-making.

Another unemployed interview subject reckoned that the entire system ought to be reformed \textit{“so jobless individuals, and not specific training courses [would] get state funding.”} Another survey subject, a young unemployed mother, had the following story to tell us:

\textit{I applied for a computer course but it cost too much, and the Job Centre would only give me support if I was unemployed. Now, shall I give up the child support I receive for an unemployment benefit? All this could have been avoided if the Job Centre had registered me as unemployed in the last year of my maternity leave, then gave me the funding to do the course. Then, I may even have been able to get a job. This way though, I have absolutely no chance to find employment.”}

Other unemployed people, as well as individuals with low qualifications informed us that \textit{“one stood no chance of getting a job unless an acquaintance pulled a few strings within the organization. Unemployment is like a tag one cannot get rid of, and if you have a child, no employer will take you.”} Unfortunately, the above phenomena apply to most other job-seekers in Hungary too.

\section{Legal protection, equal rights in everyday life}

All the above examples bear evidence to the violation of some clause, e.g. the gender, age, number of children clause, of the Hungarian equal opportunities act, and the relevant provisions of international agreements on employment, all of which Hungary has recently adopted. When making inquiries about the day-to-day enforcement of legal protection and equal rights at the workplace, we found a few interview subjects (mainly physical workers) who had never even heard of the above concepts. Most focus groups reported general problems without regard to their gender and socio-economic standing. On the other hand, we found significant differences in opinion within the individual groups, a phenomenon probably related to the different life stories and experiences of the survey subjects. We shall outline those opinions only which differed from the mean. We noted two different views on equal rights. According to one individual, equal rights do not exist in Hungary. \textit{“There still is no law which would enable the wife to report the husband to the police if he raped her.”} According to another person subscribing to this view, \textit{“the wife has every right to report him to the police, but the police will not be bothered to investigate until one party gets badly injured.”} Another interview subject informed us that \textit{“women in Sweden can wreck their husbands’ life for good with a single testimony,”} a method she found too harsh. \textit{“What we have in Hungary though is the exact opposite,”} she argued. Someone else opined that \textit{“the washing machine, the vacuum cleaner, and the wooden spoon are the only things women have to worry about.”}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{32} Unemployed individuals do have an opportunity to suggest a potential training and further training courses in which they take an interest.}
“rights women have.” According to individuals subscribing to the other view, current statutory provisions created total equality for man and woman alike. As to why such an abstract and legal form of equality has not yet turned into real equality between the two sexes in Hungary, interviewees replied that everyday life, feeding on social traditions, prejudices and stereotypes, was quite different, indeed, alienated from the law which was designed to regulate it:33 what is designated by law will not necessarily come to pass in real life. This view was shared by men and women alike. According to a person subscribing to this view, the realization of the total equality of rights is hindered „by traditions, and the fact that Hungarian society is traditionally male-dominated,” while another opined that „it was not legislation (which cannot, of course, be discriminative) but custom which caused problems in the field of legal protection.”

Without regard to age, dwelling type or the level of education, our survey subjects held views of two different sorts on the type of legal remedies available to women after experiencing physical abuse within the family. A few interviewees expressed extreme skepticism when asked about the protection of rights in Hungary, by insinuating that the very question was nonsensical in a Hungarian context:

> What kind of legal protection? A Commissioner for Female Rights, maybe? Until the legal acknowledgment of the abuse of women within the family, I do not think we can talk about legal protection in Hungary at all. If you take a sexual harassment case to the court, you will just get public humiliation, and have a nervous breakdown in the end, so it wouldn’t be worth it after all.

The (equal) rights of women are systematically violated in the labour market too, subjects of our survey remarked, insofar as women earn less than men for the same working hours. This is true particularly in the group of mothers aged 35 or over.34 The following example attests a situation of a different kind: „I saw an ad for a newspaper delivery person in the local paper, but it did not mention that women could not apply for the job. When I turned up, the person told me they wanted a delivery-man, not a woman.” The above is a perfect example of the domination of custom, and not that of law in employment practice.

3. The boundaries of social care

When enquiring about the system of social benefits, we encountered a great number of opinions regardless of their gender or socio-economic status of the individual concerned. However, everyone seemed to agree on one thing, namely that the way the current system of social benefits and allowances operates is far from perfect. According to an extreme opinion, there are no social benefits in Hungary today. This view is generally held by individuals who had already tried to claim social benefits from the state but did not succeed. Other people maintain that there is a system of social benefits in Hungary but it does not function properly. One individual named a number of reasons for the above failure:

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33 Refer to the chapter on the „Family Division of Labour“ for more on this matter.
34 This fact also implies that we did not find a single individual in our sample who had been dismissed from their workplace simply for being women. Also their is no reason why it should be otherwise when viewed from national perspective.
Ignorance, for example. I have seen a lot of people who failed to get family support because they could not fill in the forms properly. I am sure they failed to get the electricity and gas refund they would have been entitled to because they did not know how to fill in the form, or that the program existed at all.

Another interview subject described the following case:

Think of the new tax credit system! My husband’s colleague told us that only people drawing a family allowance would be entitled to tax credits. If I had been awarded a family allowance in addition to the maternity support I get, I would not have been able to claim tax credits because my maternity support would have rendered me ineligible. To get around this completely nonsensical legal clause, my husband applied for the family allowance so that we could avail ourselves of the tax credits too. However, the legal provisions are so complicated that the ordinary citizen can make no sense of it at all. Furthermore, the authorities will always find something wrong with your application.

Many people blame the highly bureaucratic system of social benefits for the above situation. These individuals find it equally nonsensical that one family is allowed only one type of social support\(^3\), even if the total value of support claimed does not exceed 15,000 HUF. (USD 62.5)

Many interview subjects lamented that a great amount of social support went to families who did not really need them. This criticism is obviously related to the issues of over-bureaucratization and ignorance mentioned above. Our interview subjects held definite views on who the main recipients of the social support program were. One individual opined that „if a Romanian refugee turned up in Hungary, he would definitely get more social support than I do.” Others again thought that „only the gypsies received state support, but they would get it even if they did not need it.” Some interview subjects took a different angle on the issue when they remarked that „although the government stopped the maternity support and allowance programs, they might resuscitate them soon. However, even if they did so, only families living on higher wages would benefit.”\(^3\) Young single mothers staying at single mothers’ homes are in particularly difficult positions - their need for child support is inevitable. Yet, it is a basic condition of eligibility that claimants have a permanent residence - which these single mothers obviously do not have. Many interview subjects lamented the narrow range of the opportunities afforded by the current status of Hungarian economy.

\(^3\) The truth is that one can be eligible for more than one type of social support

\(^3\) The Horn administration suspended the universal child support program in 1995 in the framework of the infamous „Bokros austerity package”, replacing it with a means-tested regime which made child support available in the lowest income brackets only. This was an attempt to make child support available to those only who really needed it. Along with the entire social benefit system, the forms on which claimants applied for benefits changed too, hence the above-mentioned criticism of „ignorance” which barred a great number of people from getting a family allowance. As a populist move, one of the first measures of the Orbán administration was to reinstate the universal child support system.
Another interview subject questioned the very rationale behind social support programs, saying that “all support programs are futile in an economy where everything is so expensive. Why can’t they give us jobs instead?”

IV. Changes in family life, and the family division of labour

1. Past and present roles

Regardless of age, sex, social status, education and place of residence all participants agree as to what were the tasks of women in the first half of the century: housekeeping, care and education of the children, cohesion of the family, keeping the family fireplace warm, etc. All respondents – men and women alike – feel that women were held in high esteem for the execution of these tasks and their prestige was much higher than it is today. This is related to many interactive explanations. First of all, housekeeping was a more complicated chore since no prepared, semi-prepared or deep-frozen goods existed, and, because of the lack of household mechanization, keeping the house and the garments clean demanded an input of much more time and physical effort. On the other hand, the care, supervision, upbringing and education of children – outside of school activities – was, generally, exclusively the task and responsibility of the families. Today’s women – since they have to stand up to the demands both at home and at the workplace – are frustrated, as very few are capable of handling the household chores completely, easily and without conflicts as did their predecessors, or as many of them have seen their grandmothers do it.

The contents of the traditional division of labor among family members and between sexes vary according to place of residence. The lifestyle and the living conditions of the rural, agricultural population living off the land have always differed basically from the living and working conditions of city dwellers, industrial workers, merchants, etc. In the villages “a woman could be a mother, the grandmother, if there was one, commanded in the kitchen, looked after the children. The father felt responsible for the sustenance of the family, the mother helped her husband with the larger (agricultural) labors, or they divided the labor, but the farmstead, the household and the children were all in order, the three generations lived together.” City dwellers also speak appreciatively of the tasks women performed in the households, but the nostalgia towards the multi-generation families that persisted for a longer time in the rural areas cannot, understandably, be observed. It must be stressed that the shown traditional relations existed in Hungary basically before the 2nd World War and, after 1945, in a modified form, until the cooperative movement. The stepped-up industrialization of the fifties brought with it the “two-earners family model” – which, among other things, resulted in the double-role expectations of women and the inherent conflicts. The more liberal economic policy of the 1980’s allowed the formation of economic associations as supplementary economic activity – approximating market conditions –, whose general effects were summed up by one of the respondents as follows:

37 By the way the “two-earners family model” appeared in the western part of Europe years before.
“In our family daddy worked from morning till night, this was the so-called GMK, he took on additional work after hours with which he made more money than with his principal job. At night, when he came home, he had to rest. All work concerned with the household was done by mother”.

Other respondents derive the current tradition from the traditional, male-dominated position of the breadwinner in the family.

The family pattern I brought from home was one in which my tradesman father worked all the time to support the family, and my mother did all the house chores, also serving my father at the table. Likewise, my entrepreneur husband expects me to cook and wash for him in return for him providing for me and the three children.

A few interview subjects - mainly the younger ones - resented having to serve their husbands at home after a hard day at the office, regarding it as an obvious case of exploitation. We found a quite a few interviewees in all sociological categories, namely in those of urban, rural, economically active and inactive male focus groups, who found it evident that the women would be responsible for all chores in and around the household. It may be of interest that a man living on income support expected all house chores to be carried out by his wife, and expectation which the wife fulfilled without fault.

As can be seen from the previous section, it is generally thought that the tasks of women are the same as a hundred years ago, but they must also seek employment, contribute to the income of the family. “Women still do all the housework, but, above this, they must also provide for living expenses. Often, no time is left for the children.” Independently of the region or settlement they live in, more than two-thirds of the women felt that wives still do most of the housework. Participation of the husband in these tasks often depend on the firmness of the wife: “If I want my husband to do household chores, I must fight for it.” “Women try to draw men into doing these tasks in order to get rid of old reflexes.”

Men showed a somewhat more positive view as to their contribution to household chores, as half of those questioned said that these tasks are done together by both spouses.

As to the amount of time spent with the children, men take a more active part in the life of the family, as – also in a breakdown by sexes – the proportions are about equal as to whether it is mainly the wife or the spouses jointly do the chores associated with the children and spend their recreational time together. (Participation of the whole family is greater in weekend recreational programs). We have found regional differences in the time spent with the children. In Central Transdanubia in one-fifth of the households, in Northern and North-eastern Hungary in more than two-fifths of the households child care was mainly the duty of the wife, in the other two regions this ratio

38 GMK: Workteam Association; a form of economic working community in Hungary since 1982.
is close to the share of all respondents. This can be explained by the composition of the focus groups. Two-thirds of those respondents living in the Transdanubian regions who were included in our sample have a university degree, one third graduated from high school and, what may even be more important, four-fifths of them have a job. In the Northern, North-eastern part of the country the ratio of those with only elementary education is twice that of the sample average, the ratio of skilled workers is 10% higher than the sample average and the ratio of those with secondary education is 10% lower, while those with a university degree make up only 10% of the group. Apart from the cultural differences, we must also take into account that half of the unemployed respondents included in the sample live in this region.

On the other hand, we found typically male and female chores within the family. Men are expected to fix electrical appliances when they break, and to do all the work around the house. Everything else belongs to the woman’s detail.

"Executive women tend to have a markedly different approach to house chores. „A modern woman cannot afford to say that she is a homemaker, looking after children, running the household, and all that.” Of all female executive subjects of the survey, all but one individual employed a maid, and three could afford to hire a housekeeper. The only woman who reported doing the washing up herself informed us that she did it willingly as it would give her time to have a chat with her husband, who did his equal share of the house chores, after a hard day in the office. „In my opinion, family chores do a great deal for the family. We have the best chats while doing the work which is why I opposed so fiercely the taking away of house chores from the family. I am not a masochist but I do think that washing the dishes, making food, and cleaning up together can draw family members together on a regular basis. I would never get a maid!”

On the basis of the answers of female focus groups it was revealed that an urban environment and higher education carried more active male involvement in house chores. The relationship becomes more apparent if one considers the account offered by male interview subjects. We find it important to stress, however, that even under the most favourable division of labour at home, women still did the larger share of household chores. In rural areas and in families with very low education, women are still expected to perform the lion’s share of house chores. In light of the above, we found it curious that one rural focus group should mention an equal division of labour in the household. This probably gains an explanation if one considers the traditional gender-specific division of labour in the (larger) household: i.e. pig-killing or farming are typically male occupations while women are expected to do all the cooking, washing and cleaning up in the house.

Single women took a more negative angle on the above state of affairs. Considering that nearly all of them were divorcees, their husbands’ refusal to partake in any of the house chores may have had something to do with their decision to separate from them. Yet, it is equally possible that a separated woman would describe her husband as someone infinitely worse than he really was. An interview subject left with all the house chores informed us that „there are a few decent husbands around, but they
are definitely an exception to the rule.” Most people agreed that social traditions, indeed, the way men were brought up were responsible for the above state of affairs. „I depends on the man, doesn’t it? Some men expect no household favours from their wives, others do: this is how they are brought up. Another interviewee opined that „men are brought up to expect women to do everything for them. A man who never helped his mother around the house will not give his wife a hand either. The most he will do is a few male chores, like collecting fire-woods for tea.”

2. Unexpected changes caused by transition and their effect on the division of labour

In the distribution of chores within the family changes can happen for various reasons – even as a result of the transition. One of these is when the man becomes unemployed. In theory, we could expect the man to do more in the household since now he has much free time. In reality, it does not work this way. About a quarter of those answered the question could give no answer to this question as they could not fathom how their husbands would act in such a case. Half of the respondents believed that the unemployed status of the man will cause no changes, that is, the husband will not work more in the home. As says one embittered wife: “He drank more. He yelled more and helped less.” The general opinion is that men either cannot or only with great difficulty can handle such crises, and in such situations reach for the bottle. Men themselves admit that the loss, or even just the partial loss of their status as the family provider is a major crisis for them. Some women expressly feel that men cannot cope with any kind of major change – be that positive or negative. Always in these situations women help them. “Men more probably fall ill under these conditions. Men die much faster from such situations – until that time it never occurred to him, but now he starts observing himself and soon finds something. He feels superfluous.” Some women do not even expect their husbands to help more with the housework in such case, as they themselves feel that this task belongs to women under all circumstances. “He can get on the woman’s nerves all day, it just gets worse. He may help a little, but it is a difficult time until he can come to terms with being laid off. Fort a while he finds things to do at home, but later he just can’t find his place and he may annoy everyone”. Some women did find though positive aspects along with the obvious difficulties in the husband’s unemployment. “This is the time when black market dealings and odd jobs come forward, which are, of course, good39, since nowadays this is the only possible and profitable way of making money, but the family suffers greatly. Because then one must jump right away if some work comes up, there is no weekend, Christmas or New Year’sEve. And then he disappears, for long times if necessary. The woman stays alone with the children (...) And it is even worse if he just sits at home and does nothing, or goes about with his buddies and just whiles his time away. Maybe it is better if he goes fishing, like a maniac, day in, day out. But if he starts with the pubs, that is the end of the family.”

Our respondents differed, according to region, in the judgment of the effects of the male becoming unemployed on the distribution of household chores. Four-fifths of those who

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39 How “good” this is, is tainted by the fact that in the case of black labor the ”employer” pays no health or social security contributions, which poses grave problems at the age of retirement, as this can further decrease the already low pensions.
could not respond lived in Budapest and its agglomerates and in Central Transdanubia, which are least affected by unemployment. All respondents from the Southern Alföld region said that unemployment of the husband did not alter his share of household work. From the other three regions, the division of labor according to sexes was felt to be unaffected by one third of the respondents, while two-thirds said it was changed.

Of course, the situation may arise that the woman is laid off from work. Of those who had opinion about the topic, 60% feel that in this case the wife has to work even more in the household, as now a job does not occupy her time, and therefore things are expected to run even more smoothly at home. “They are glad when a woman becomes unemployed because there is lunch at the table and they are taken care of. You are at home all day; you can wait on them.” Women agree that they can cope with unemployment better. As to the reasons, we were given two kinds of replies. According to one “women may also break psychologically, but they are tougher, they handle it differently. If nothing else, a woman finds things to do in the household and does not punish herself contemplating about ‘what now?’”. For others, unemployment presents no strain: “I worked but I was glad to leave that place, I was on the verge of breaking up, I was relieved when they sent me away. I was even happy to become unemployed.” These women feel, just the same way as most of the men, that they are only doing what they did earlier – or in the era of traditional division of labor –, that is, they become housewives again.

Regional differences can also be seen in this respect, as well. The respondents from Northern and North-Eastern Hungary all felt that changes occur in the division of household labor when the woman becomes unemployed. In the Southern Alföld region, one third of the respondents felt that the division of labor between man and wife changed, two-thirds felt that it did not change when the woman lost her job. The other two regions represent an in-between opinion.

According to 45% of the women questioned, the fact that the woman starts to work outside of the home changes the division of household labor, and 55% said that it does not. Many of those who feel that no change occurs say that “for men it is of no interest, everything is still left to the woman.” To some women it does not even occur that there should be a change, for them employment only means “less time at home”, but will still have to do everything themselves.

As opposed to them, out of the 70 men questioned 50 said that the division of labor at home is changed when the woman gets a job. Only 20% felt that nothing changes at home with the woman starting to work.

Looking at the distribution of answers according to regions, we can see that the number of respondents who consider the woman’s employment as an influencing factor in the division of household chores is above the average in the Central Transdanubian region, and below the average in the Southern Alföld region.

Considering the responses concerning the effects of the employment or unemployment of the husband or the wife on the division of household labor, we may conclude that the traditional, according-to-sexes division of tasks survives primarily in the Southern Alföld region.

According to two-thirds of the women respondents, the division of household labor does not change even if the woman earns more than her husband. Some cannot
even imagine such a situation: “This only happens in fairy tales.” “Heaven forbid that she should earn more.” Here is one quotation to illustrate how special and strange such a situation may be: “I kept my wages a secret, I bought things and did not explain where they came from, they were just there, and I did not say that now I earn more.” Those who state that the higher income of the woman does change things agree that in this situation the man feels that his family supporting role is threatened, and this is likely to lead to conflicts. Even according to men it is more probable that in such a case an outside person is asked to help with the household chores rather than the man assuming part of these. If the woman’s income increases (for example, she is re-employed after the maternity leave), they feel that they may afford contracting regular help because of the increased family income.

Of the male respondents 59 think that the division of labor changes if the woman earns more, 12 said that it does not change (18 did not respond). However, it does not turn out if this change is attributed to their greater contribution to household activities or to the employment of outside help.

The distribution of the opinions of respondents from Budapest or its agglomerates and from Central Transdanubia approximates the distribution of opinion of all respondents. In the other two regions, those who felt that the higher income of the woman does not influence the division of household labor were in a higher ratio from the Southern Alföld and in a lower ratio from Northern Hungary.

To the question as to whether the division of household labor is changed by the fact that the woman starts an enterprise, about one third of the women and 22 of the men polled did not answer. 80% of the female respondents and all the men felt this to be a change provoking occurrence. Let us quote the following general opinion of entrepreneur women: “it is just one more thing to worry about.” “That is even more murderous than to work in shifts. At least there you can calculate when and how, when you will have the night shift, how much you will have at the end of the month. With an enterprise it does not work this way. Of course many people say how lucky you are since you have no boss, you are your own master, but that’s not how it really is! Because you always push yourself more, you end up doing things for yourself that you wouldn’t do for a boss. If necessary, men’s work, as well […] At the end of the day you don’t feel like doing much of anything, and this takes its toll on the child as well. The collaboration of the whole family is needed, the grandmother also has to help, the kid cannot always be in the store.” Urban entrepreneur women say the following: “this is when paid outside help comes in, it doesn’t even arise that the husband should help more.” The situation is different for rural entrepreneurs: “If the woman starts a venture she has to work more, but so does the man.”

The most marked regional difference in the distribution of responses is that almost half of those polled in Central Transdanubia and Southern Hungary did not take a stand on this question.

The opinion on women assuming a role in the public or political life is almost unanimous: it is important for women to be present in politics as they possess several advantageous traits such as empathy and social sensitivity. Opinions vary as to how successful such an undertaking can be. I was said especially by villagers that “men do not look on women as equal partners.” “A change of attitudes is needed. Women have
to fight harder to be accepted into politics.” The general opinion is that the assumption of a public role can affect the family adversely, and that only older women – those who have grown-up children – may consider taking such a role on the merits. At the same time, the husband’s support of the wife’s ambition is necessary. In connection with a woman’s assumption of a political role, men stressed that thus the wife spends less time at home and may have or must have outside help. The majority of those who could not imagine a woman taking on a venture, also deemed the political role of women as fiction.

About 40% of those polled could not answer this question and, as before, most of the non-responding persons lived in Central Transdanubia and in the Southern Alföld region. In spite of limited personal experiences and personal involvement, 80% of the respondents felt that the division of household labor must change in this case.

3. Children: responsibility and/or source of joy

Members of all focus groups including men agreed that having a baby was a difficult decision to make in Hungary as the cost implications of such a decision were relatively high and long-lasting. We found it strange, yet illuminating that very few interview subjects thought that having a baby could be fun too. „Responsibility” and „financial burden” tended to be the first thoughts of most interview subjects.

* „I is a great responsibility to have children because one will have to bring them up in a very expensive world. Baby clothes cost a lot of money, and mothers don’t get half as much family support as they used to.”

* „Before, one could fully furnish and decorate the children’s room out of the trade union family allowance, now it wouldn’t even be enough to buy a pram.”

* „Having a baby in Hungary is quite different from Germany. There, one is full of excitement planning for the future, going out shopping for baby clothes, decorating the baby’s room while here, one is instantly dragged down by thoughts of how to provide for the baby, and make a living after giving birth to the child. Even if one is really keen on having a baby, one is bound to be less excited under such circumstances. What if one can’t get a job for years after going on maternity leave?

* „Having a child has become such a burden that one has to consider whether it is worth it at all. One can’t have an abortion after giving birth to the baby.”

Perceptions of financial difficulties and the general responsibility of having a baby are well illustrated in the following story, recounted by a mother of four:

When I walk down the street with my four children, people will stare at us as if we were lepers. They will be thinking: „Jesus Christ, why would anyone want four children in this world?” My children were born quite a few years ago, and back then I did have the means to provide for them all. But not any more...
"With four children, I can’t even get a job,” says another mother of four, referring to the multiple problems affecting larger families.

When discussing problems which large families face in Hungary, one must, of course, make a reference to the ethnic ramifications of the issue. Our interview subjects believed that Hungarian Roma couples had children only to be able to get multiple child support, or non-repayable loans from the state. "Only the gypsies have loads of children because they are just a source of income to them - in the form of those non-repayable building-construction loans which they get from the government for every child they have." Another person opined that "soon we’ll see an ethnic shift in Hungary, with more gypsies than Hungarians living here because only gypsies have the guts to have many children; Hungarians plan ahead sensibly and have children only if they know they will be able to provide for them." We also recorded a few opinions latently referring to the Roma: "Those who work will think twice before having a baby, knowing the existential burden children can have on the family, while those other people will have loads of babies just to be able to claim a family allowance from the state."

In light of the above, the provision of state support to families with children seems absolutely vital. There was virtually unanimous agreement among survey participants (only five individuals disagreed) that the current system of state support provision was inappropriate. "Families decide not to have children because the amount of money they would have to spend on a child is disproportionately higher than the amount of child support they could claim from the state." Another individual reckoned that "children are the best assets of a state, but governmental officials won’t give more money to families with children because they want to pocket it themselves." Many interview subjects thought the level of state support so ridiculous that they did not even justify their response, just scoffed and waved their hand in disapproval. As mentioned above, a large majority of female entrepreneurs coming from rural areas became entrepreneurs out of sheer necessity. In light of this fact, we find it quite shocking that entrepreneurs in Hungary are entitled to no state support of any sort, without regard to the profitability (or lack of profitability) of their businesses.

The problem stems from the lack of information on support programs. The local municipality is meant to provide information on such issues. When the new child support program was introduced, I headed straight for the office to apply, and told the administrator that I had read about the program in the local paper, and discovered that I was eligible. She told me I should consider myself lucky to have time to read.

Above, we outlined the general employment prospects of women with children in Hungary. Of all the survey participants, only three individuals thought the employment prospects of mothers satisfactory, and they all happened to be old age pensioners (not the same three individuals who classified the state support system as satisfactory), individuals whom the issue did not concern directly. One of the above OAPs mentioned that she had heard of a woman who returned to work after being away on maternity leave. All other survey participants characterized the employment prospects of mothers as unsatisfactory.
Opinions also varied (about 50-50%) as to the availability and standard of child care establishments. Those who felt that the availability and activity of these centers are inadequate said that “the problem is the school, they are too many in the class”. “One cannot always obtain a place in day-care nursery (for the child), more and more establishments close down, the catering service at school is too expensive.” Those who held an ambivalent view recounted both positive and negative aspects: “They are good, but the number of places in the kindergarten is limited, and if there is a younger sibling then the child is not accepted in the kindergarten”. There were respondents who considered the child care institutions unambiguously adequate – although some of them were pensioners who said that in their day the situation was worse.

There are regional differences in the evaluation of child-care establishments. Least satisfied – about a quarter of the respondents – are those living in the capital and its agglomerates. About one-third of the respondents from Transdanubia and Northern, North-Eastern Hungary and 4/5 of the respondents from the Southern Alföld region felt that the availability and standard of these establishments was adequate. Unfortunately, we do not have enough information as to the explanation of this phenomenon. It may justifiably assumed that in the latter region there are no more and no better child care institutions than elsewhere in the country, thus the reason for the difference in opinion may be found in the differences in the needs or the circumstances of families.

The valuation of the mother- and child-welfare institutions divided the group of polled women into three, almost equal parts. 40% of those questioned said that these institutions functioned well. “Here in the mother-and-child provisional hostel one can get room, advice, help with economizing, and clothes and shoes from charities.” Someone from another group said the same thing: “the mother-child provisional hostels or the family protection centers are good, they help where they can.” According to about 30% of the respondents these institutions functioned inadequately. “There are homes for mothers where one can run for shelter, but only in Budapest. And if you live elsewhere?” “Much more attention should be given to handicapped families, a sort of personal care for which nobody has any drive now. (Family assistance, guardianship, municipal government).” “Girls” clubs. Have you ever been to a district child-welfare center?” “What does it mean, protection of mothers? I don’t even know what that is. Sure, on a foundation basis for battered, evicted or driven-out women, but there is no protection against the daily hardships.” About 30% of the respondents could not form an opinion, due to lack of information.

[...] Out of the men questioned 34 did not respond, and the majority (42 persons) of those who gave their opinion did not consider these institutions adequate. The difference between the opinion of men and women can be attributed to men expressing

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40 In this case the mother is most likely at home with the younger sibling on maternity leave and she is „encouraged” to keep the older child at home as well – this phenomenon is common in the state- or local government owned – and subsidized – child care institutions.

41 A nebulous division seems to be outlined by the opinions, one that should be handled delicately. Of those who deemed these institutions as well-functioning the ratio of blue-collar workers and less educated women is somewhat higher, of those who deemed them poorly functioning the ratio of higher educated women is somewhat higher, amongst the non-responders, the villagers prevailed. However, the limits of this study do not allow one to make deductions as to the actual ratios or any subsequent validity.
their dissatisfaction as to rather the number of the institutions than the standard of the functioning ones.

Of those women who felt themselves to be somewhat informed in this question, 60% felt that the mother- and child-welfare institutions were satisfactory.

Looking at the valuations according to regions we find that the ratio of those satisfied with these institutions is similar to that in the previous question. These establishments were considered to be good enough by the most respondents in the Southern Alföld region (three-fourths), somewhat less in Central Transdanubia and North-Eastern Hungary (2/3 of the respondents). In Budapest and its agglomerates only half of the respondents said that these establishments were good.

Of those polled, 90% felt that the cost of education for children was high compared to the average income. “The new books are very expensive and have to be bought each year. This is very wasteful.” “The costs aren’t the problem, the wages are, compared to them they are high [the costs]”. High costs represent a serious problem for the families. “One doesn’t even dare to think of the child entering higher education.” “It is ridiculous, September is the most dreaded month. The books, the gym dress, the notebooks, the gym shoes every year, normal clothes, class money, even the food is different [that is what is put on the table at home]”. The 10% of the respondents who felt that the cost of education was acceptable was made up of 31-35 year old single women from Northern Hungary (8 persons) and entrepreneur women from the capital (27 persons).

The quality of public education also separated the respondents. Regardless of group affiliation, two-thirds felt that the quality of public education was not up to the standard. Some mentioned that it also depended on the place of residence, as there were better schools in the cities. “If it were good, they would teach trades would allow one to get employment, but there aren’t enough jobs for the young, either”, say the unemployed. “It’s not life-like, there isn’t enough motivation, one studies without goals.” “There is much confusion, everybody teaches what comes into their heads. There is no uniform system of requirements.” “One has to study a lot, they are overburdened, this is because that is what higher education demands.” One third of the respondents felt the level of public education was satisfactory. “There is no problem with this because when we look at it, Hungarian kids and not the Americans always take the prize at competitions. One would think that the education in a wealthy country is good. But it isn’t.” “Surely it is good, because more and more schools have computers and if one doesn’t like one school he can take the child to another one.”

About half of the men are satisfied with the quality of public education, but because of their low incidence number this cannot be taken as a tendency.

Looking at the distribution of answers according to regions, it can be seen that the respondents from Central Transdanubia and Northern, North-Eastern Hungary felt public education to be good or inadequate by a ratio of 2:3. In the other two regions less than 1/3 of the respondents evaluated it as good, and slightly more than 2/3 as inadequate.
V. Relations, economic status and the consumption of individuals living in a single household

1. Economic operation of households, characteristics of consumption

The question whether men or women were the main beneficiaries of the regime change of 1989 yielded answers of two types, answers surprisingly similar in character. 40 percent of all survey participants thought that men were the real beneficiaries of the regime change. A small minority within this group argued that this was due to men being more resourceful than women. “Men are braver, they risk more, they have an innate entrepreneurial spirit, and they aren’t bogged down with petty family affairs.” The above view reflects an exceptionally strong preference for the traditional division of labour. However, the majority within the above group did not believe that success after the regime change was GENDER-related, but rather a function of the position which the individual occupied in the previous era. These individuals also admitted that the majority of such positions had traditionally been occupied by men. “The regime change of 1989 yielded more for men as they had been the ones to occupy executive positions before too. They had more information on processes shaping the economy, and on new opportunities.”

According to 55 percent of survey participants, GENDER was not the main determinant of success in the post-socialist era. The main difference between the two subgroups was that this latter group specifically argued that it was the position which one occupied in the previous regime which constituted the key factor in one becoming a winner of the regime change of 1989.

The only difference between members of this and previous group was that these individuals specifically excluded the possibility of GENDER being the main determinant of success, while the previous group concentrated on position. We assume that the above slight difference in opinion denotes a difference in attitude. “People in power in the previous regime remained in power irrespective of their gender,” and “this is not a question of gender, it is a question of hard work, and being in position at the right time and place. One needed a bit of luck too to know what to get into.” We found again that socio-economic status had no bearing on the answer given.

Enquiring about practices of money management within the family, we detected a slight correspondence between age and the above practice: more than half of all retired survey participants, without respect to their profession or educational qualifications, were to be found in the group of individuals responsible for the income management of the family. The explanatory power of the above phenomenon was slightly compromised by the fact that many of the above individuals were either widowed or divorced. One would find people aged 55 or over too in the group of couples managing family finances together, but it was positively the younger generations who adhered to this practice. We detected the pattern of the husband managing financial matters in the family in one-twentieth of all cases. This practice seemed to form the minority practice in all socio-economic groups investigated. Indeed, this is why we gave up on investigating the socio-economic background of this particular answer given by interview subjects.

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Related to the question of handling the money in the family is the issue of shopping. Women tend to do the daily grocery shopping because they presumably know prices and family needs better than their husbands. "Women make food, hence they have to do the shopping too," and "men know nothing about prices. When they find something on the shelves, they will buy it straight away. It makes no difference to them that they could have bought the same product at half price if only they looked around a bit. One can’t save money like that." Another person told us that "it is women everywhere who do the shopping. What would a poor man do in the shop, everyone would laugh at him for doing the shopping." In many families, husbands help out doing the weekly shopping. One individual thought it useful: "Let them carry the bags!" This was one shopping-related activity for women to be able to rely on their husbands for help. However, even women thought shopping ought to be a primarily female undertaking. "This is how it evolved historically, and due to tradition. Men don’t like to go shopping. Men would be ridiculed if they meddled in such female affairs." The only survey subjects who cared to disagree were executive women from Budapest (the maid did the shopping for them), and single women for whom, we assumed, the mother would do the shopping.

The vast majority of men and women thought that they would be an asset to both the family and society if the mother stayed at home with the children. "If the husband makes enough money; both the children and the household would benefit if the wife stayed at home as a homemaker. It would be a lot better for society too as people would be less stressed." Another individual thought that "the social appreciation of homemakers is on the rise again. It is only the woman who can secure the warmth of the family nest." Another person recounted the following story:

Irish mothers tend to have 3-4 babies, but they don’t work. They look up to their husbands no matter how mediocre they are. This is better for the family for lack of rivalry between the spouses. Men are respected for the work they do, and women mind their own business. I don’t think this is so bad, is it?

Another person opined that "homemakers should have social insurance too so that they can draw a private pension for bringing up three children. Why would child-rearing be less labour intensive than say typing?" Many individuals reckoned that it would be beneficial to women and society alike if women stayed at home with their children, being homemakers and full-time mothers, but society failed to acknowledge the benefits of such a system. The lack of social recognition is so widespread in Hungary that the very individuals concerned doubted the social value and utility of such activities. "I is most important that women who decide to become homemakers learn to appreciate their role, and get some self-esteem."

We also asked members of the focus groups what they would provide to their family without question. Most people thought of consumer goods automatically. A slight majority mentioned assets such as love, family support and similar non-material

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42 The above quotes corroborate the finding that the household is the main "arena" for women, an arena in which they feel comfortable and competent (a fact which they often emphasized in joking manner too).
43 We could not turn the answers into numerical data as the interviewees classified their answers subjectively.
values too. "Safety and existential security, love, a harmonious environment and health are the most important assets for a family." Many of those individuals who mentioned consumer goods in the first place had problems providing the most basic necessities (food, gas and electricity) for their families. This group included jobless individuals, physical workers, middle-level professionals from the country-side and old age pensioners. We found many single women in the above group, a sure sign of the existential insecurity of staying single in Hungary. "Food, bills and paying the mortgage are what we must have money for. The kids new two things: food and medication." The other group had the financial means to satisfy higher level necessities. Members of all socio-economic categories, save the executives and politicians from Budapest, belonged in this category. Although paying the bills and mortgage on the house was not a problem for these individuals, they could not afford any real luxuries, only a dog, an inexpensive hobby, or some entertainment and culture: "I will not change my diet no matter how much it costs," or "I will always try new products, like a new toothpaste." Note that none of the above indulgences may be considered luxuries in the real sense of the word. It was only the group of executives and decision-makers from Budapest who had the means to finance necessities of a markedly difference nature: necessities such as a maid, expensive holidays abroad and the theatre.

We also asked survey participants what consumer goods or activities they have had to give up since the economic changes. Budapest executives mentioned leisure time, but seemed to have no financial problems. "The greatest luxury for us was that we could all go to Cyprus together last year. It was not a matter of money, rather the luxury of being together for ten days."

Interviewees did not separate their own needs and those of the family when having to give up a few luxuries. They simply gave up on cultural consumption such as buying books, going to the theatre, movies, and concerts. Some people gave up buying newspapers. Most interviewees mentioned that they also had to forgo holidays, just like going to restaurants and cafés. Some women mentioned a few female "luxuries" which they could not afford, luxuries such as a new dress, the hairdresser or a beautician. Some others had to stop seeing a gynaecologist for lack of money.

As to what the new economic system made available to people, survey subjects would mention general concepts like the information society, freedom and a wide range of consumer goods. "One can buy anything in the shops today: a VCR, a car, a mobile phone, a computer, but who has got the money to buy such things?" Others mentioned infrastructural developments, such as sewage systems in remote areas or cable television. Some others mentioned issues of negative change when asked the above question, issues such as poverty, indebtedness or stress.

We may conclude that people considered everything a luxury that they could not afford. A few individuals mentioned going to the dentist, others thought of having a car as a luxury.

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44 The above responses should not be taken as firm evidence of changes in cultural preferences as it is most likely that even those individuals who rarely ever bought a book, or went to see a play, mentioned books and the theatre as luxuries which they now had to forgo. However, one mother did mention that she most resented the fact that she could not buy her children books any more.

45 In general, people tend to feel it is their obligation to privately renumerate the doctor for his services.
2. Coping strategies in crises

We also enquired what survey participants would do if an undesirable event (unemployment, illness, death) disrupted the life of the family. We found that the vast majority of subjects had no ready-made strategy to handle such a situation. Many people refuse to acknowledge that a disaster may strike their families too. "We don’t want to think about it because it would drive us mad," or "we would be too scared to think of such an event." However, even those people who had pondered over such an eventuality (and they form the majority) have no strategy to deal with the situation. Instead, they would turn to the family or friends for help. A lot of people would be content to have a decent chat with a friend in such a situation. "I’ll talk it over with my girlfriends or with the neighbours to eliminate the stress," or "the family will talk it over." Another group of survey participants would not be shaken if some sort of disaster struck their families. They all thought that they would find some way out of the situation. "If I lost my job, I would start looking for another one instantly." Another group of people found solace in religion. "I will never lose my faith in God, not even in hard times. Problems always take care of themselves, and what seemed like a disaster yesterday may turn out to be a lucky occurrence tomorrow - God will have saved you, in any case. If my loved ones died, I would not consider that a tragedy because true faith brings everlasting life to all believers." 46

Only an extremely small proportion of survey participants had specific strategies to handle unexpected crisis situations. It was no accident that the majority of these individuals were entrepreneurs. 47 Entrepreneurs will so "arrange that others can overtake the business if disaster struck." Others will "take out insurance." Similar to entrepreneurs, a young professional from Budapest preferred to insure both herself and her husband for unexpected occurrences. The story of an old age pensioner indicates the prevalence of disaster planning in day-to-day decisions: "I may be able to buy a pair of shoes if I saved up for three months, but I would not want to spend my savings on shoes for unexpected events and expenses may come up at any time."

Day-to-day existential security, as the above paragraphs illustrate, is the one asset of the past that interview subjects showed real craving for. In light of this great desire, the range of strategies and solutions devised for crisis situations was surprisingly inadequate.

Entrepreneurship as an alternative to unemployment, and deteriorating living conditions was mentioned by entrepreneurs only. Women who make up 30 percent of Hungarian entrepreneurs cannot, of course, be considered "entrepreneurs by necessity" although the all mentioned some event in their lives to which private entrepreneurship seemed the most potent and obvious solution. In general, the level of education of

46 Unfortunately, we could not make out what denomination members of this group belonged to.
47 Naturally, one should not draw the conclusion that all entrepreneurs think this way, or than non-entrepreneurs have no strategies for unexpected crises.
Hungarian female entrepreneurs is higher than that of active wage-earners, and a vast majority of them left positions of employment for ones of autonomous entrepreneurship. The highest proportion of female entrepreneurs came from the 40-54 age group. In this group, the number of divorcees was significantly higher than in the group of male entrepreneurs of the same age. Hungarian female entrepreneurs tend to utilize their specialist knowledge (deriving from the experience of former jobs) in their respective fields of enterprise. They tend to work in the service and trade sectors. They are also more pessimistic as concerns the future of their enterprise, less growth and export and more security-oriented than their male counterparts.

3. The importance of health

Survey subjects had equally convoluted concepts of health - without respect to socio-economic status. Those emphasizing the positive aspects of health would say that physical health was everything one could wish for, the dearest asset, the foundation of all, the importance of which compares to love only. Health, and one’s inner peace and harmony and resilience are equally important pre-conditions of a good career. The existential content of the concept of health was expressed by the following individual: „health is one”s best investment, and one that requires a lot of after-care.” Others had a more negative approach to the concept, portraying health as the mere lack of illness, and characterizing illness as a physical and financial tragedy because, according to a group of village people, „it is too expensive to fall ill in Hungary.”

It was mainly urban dwellers who specifically referred to the link between the preservation of health and one”s life-style, appreciating the importance of the right diet, good stamina, and that of frequent physical workouts.

Cleanliness was thought to be integral to good health by rural people, among them the Roma groups. Most ingredients of a healthy diet, i.e. milk, honey, fruit, fruit juice, groceries, wholemeal bread and some other necessities, such as vitamins, herbal tea, fitness products, were considered too costly by most people. Survey participants still availed themselves of such products and bought Béres drops, Vitamin C, Plusz tablets, Supradin, Centrum, calcium against calcium deficiency, lecithin, Swedish drops, etc.

A few rural interview subjects expressed distrust of synthetic products, preferring natural foodstuffs, such as fruit and groceries. According to them, health may not be preserved by taking tablets.

In addition to their dwelling place, subjects” approach to health was also heavily affected by their age. To people aged over 55 years of age, the preservation of health meant hospitals, doctors and medication. Some younger subjects of our survey did have a more holistic view of health, referring to healthy foods, body workouts, vitamins and the avoidance of stress as important elements.

4. Legal protection of women’s economic interest in marriage and during divorce
With a few exceptions, survey subjects did not conclude a marital contract on property rights before getting married. This legal institution is still relatively unpopular in Hungary, probably because citizens did not even learn that such an institution existed until the 1990s. We noted two views on the matter. According to one, spouses should definitely conclude such an agreement before the wedding to make things easier, and eliminate legal disputes, in the case of a divorce. According to the other, such a contract would demonstrate the partners’ lack of trust in one another, and as such, it may potentially become the very cause of their separation. \( \text{A marital property contract is the most stupid thing I have heard in my life as it carries the very seed of the destruction of the marriage. Why bother to get married if you don’t trust your partner? If everything is fine in the marriage morally, intellectually and psychologically, there will be no need for a divorce or divorce settlement, and partners can just continue loving each other.} \)

According to most survey participants, such a contract would always benefit the husband because it would enable him to preserve the favourable financial position in which he entered the marriage. A small minority thought that both partners would benefit because of the unambiguity of the situation (in case of a divorce). We found even less people who thought such a contract would benefit the wife primarily.

\( \text{This contract will benefit men primarily because they know from hearsay that some women can wreck their husbands so well that they won’t have a pot to piss in after the divorce. So, people with a bit of intelligence, and those who know their marriage won’t last anyway will do best to make such a contract.} \)

Others emphasize the lack of trust such a contract would cause: \( \text{I have heard of a lady who decided not to marry her fiancé because of this contract, thinking that if he was this distrustful even before they got married, what would he be like later?} \)

Divorce tends to upset the family setup quite dramatically. Note that in Hungarian legal practice, mothers tend to be awarded the child from, and the flat acquired during, the marriage. On the other hand, one has to save up for a flat or house for decades, and it is not uncommon for people to use their parents’ savings to buy property. In light of the above state of affairs, a divorce is likely to have an adverse psychological affect on every party involved, including the children. As to who would suffer the most financially in a divorce case, we heard many different opinions.

A woman is likely to suffer the burden of having to provide for the child(ren) and run the household after a divorce, and the father may not be that keen on paying child maintenance either.

\( \text{After a divorce, the mother remains the only bread-winner in the family, her situation will be more precarious, and she does not even know whether the father will pay child maintenance. One cannot finance a family out of child maintenance. Furthermore, there will be no more division of labour between man and wife; she may have to pay someone to look after the baby, pick them} \)
up at school, move heavy furniture, or fix things in the house, things which she would have asked the father to do before the divorce.

Some women told us that their entrepreneur husbands registered as labourers on minimum wage to pay the proportionate amount of child maintenance. ⁴⁸

Those who considered men the main losers of a divorce reported that women tended to get everything in a divorce settlement, and men were often left with nothing, having to start their building a new life from scratch. „Men are less resourceful: they often turn to alcohol, or end up on the streets. They become rootless, often losing their jobs too after getting divorced.”

The opinions we heard from members of the male control groups were equally mixed. They acknowledged that losing the man meant losing the „real bread-winner” in the family (as mentioned above, Hungarian men tend to earn more than women). On the other hand, it is usually the man who is left without a place to stay after the divorce, a grave problem which they often cannot rectify.

The gender-related variations in opinion probably stem from the different financial factors men and women emphasize in a divorce. Those who think women lose out in a divorce tend to base their arguments on the high income of the man, while those who think men are the ones to lose out focus on the difficulties of building a new life and existence while having to pay child maintenance.

VI. Violence and abuse, shelter and the polity

1. Violence in general

Making enquiries about the spread of aggression against women, we encountered opinions of two types. One group of people was of the opinion that more and more acts of violence are targeted at women today. Although not many of them explained their views, many of them tended to think of abuse within the family, while others meant sexual harassment at work. „Most bosses want to hire attractive young salesgirls to work in the stores. If you want the job, you will have to do him a few favours. Although one does have a choice, it clearly is a case of sexual abuse.” The majority of interview subjects reckoned that the number of abusive acts increased recently, but such acts were not just directed at women but also at men, children and all people „weak”. „Not only women, but men and children get abuse too. The sky is the limit!” or, „I don’t think that women get mugged more often, but that’s probably because they can look after themselves better, they do not get wasted in the pub, or simply because they know that they are weaker, and will not go into risky situations.” According to another individual „unfortunately, men, women and children are all equally prone to violence in this crazy world.” Others again adhered to the opposite view, disputing all claims of rising abuse against women or others. „It is all media hype. There isn’t half as much abuse on the streets as the telly would have you believe.” However, the number of people adhering to

⁴⁸ Reporting a minimum wage is one of the chief methods of tax evasion in Hungary.
the media hype theory was even less than those who believed that the new wave of aggression affected women primarily.

2. Violence in the family

As concerns the issue of abuse within the family, we would like to stress that not many people found it easy to talk about their experiences, especially in front of other member of the focus groups. In spite of the above, we do believe that violence in the family is a living problem in Hungary today (Tóth, Abuse in the family, 1999, TÁRKI). Many people mentioned that the first time they came across this phenomenon was in the media. We also met quite a few individuals who reported that saw it happen in their environment. „I does happen in those farmsteads around the village, not in the village. I have heard stories of individuals living alone on a farm being physically assaulted by intruders,” or „I saw it happen in the neighborhood. Those drunkards next door quarrel all the time. I can’’t see it but I can hear her say, „Hit me if you dare!”, then she will go, „Don’’t hurt me, please!”” In virtually all cases of abuse, survey participants mention the role of alcohol in the affair, including the participants of one male focus group. „If the husband gets drunk, somebody will get hurt.” A few individuals reported that they too have been the subject of abuse. Understandably, they did not wish to go into details concerning the abuse they suffered in the family. Some individuals did, however, tell us specific examples. „I did happen occasionally that my husband beat me, broke my arm, and stabbed me with a knife.” We found it shocking that some women did not find abuse in the family particularly deplorable. „I know a girl who is frequently beaten by her boyfriend, but she still wouldn’t leave him. I reckon she’s mad.” To this, another member of the focus group replied: „I know a similar case but these people have a good marriage.” In other words, frequent abuse and a good marriage are not mutually exclusive categories, according to this individual.49

Survey participants mentioned a few well-known civil organizations and governmental authorities as forums which they can turn to in the case of abuse. It may be of particular interest that men tend to know these organizations just as well as women do. Curiously, we detected no correlation between age, dwelling place, or even the level of education and the awareness of such institutions. We could not tell whether individuals knew of such organizations because of a previous history of abuse. Many subjects mentioned the police, adding that they did not consider them efficient at all. „The police will not get involved until somebody gets hurt.” „The police haven’t got time for such issues. They will ask you what happened over the phone, but they will never come out to check things are OK.” Somebody else reckoned that „even the police think this is a private affair.” Some people mentioned the local government, the state guardianship office and family support centres as authorities they may turn to in such an event. The reason municipalities came up so many times was probably related to the fact that local governments perform guardianship and family support functions in smaller villages. The larger institutions included: NANE, Women’s House, the Eszter Foundation, Blue Line, the Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights, the Red Cross and some other help lines and crisis centers. The utility of help offered by the

49 While we could not determine how frequent such behaviour was in marriages in Hungary, the real question remained: what method does one use to stop such acts of abuse?
above institutions is heavily compromised by the fact that people tend to turn to them after the damage has been done, i.e. well after the point when preventive treatment could have been applied. We also encountered the opinion that such institutions did not exist at all. “There are no such organizations, and the police do nothing in the matter either.” Others were aware of the existence of such institutions but thought that “a proud woman would never turn to an institution for abused women. Personal relationships (i.e. mother and best friend) are more important.” As in other difficult life situations in Hungary, family and friends constituted the main source of mental assistance for abused women too. This was the most widely-shared view although some individuals remarked that they would have no one to rely on but themselves. Others again would find solace in religion. “We must listen to God at all times, and then our problems become tolerable again.”

3. The role of religion in the life of women

Religion did not play an important role in the life of most survey subjects. There was a small minority among the participants, however, to whom religion was above everything else. Opinions varied on the role of the church in Hungary. Our non-religious interview subjects leveled heavy criticism at the church.

“All churches have become more aggressive lately, not just the smaller sects but the Catholic church too. 20-30 years ago, they seemed delighted if someone turned up for a religious wedding, the priest asked no questions. Today, they have got so many regulations, it is no wonder nobody can be bothered to get a religious ceremony.”

Another person recounted the following story: “My mother died in 1993. She was a Protestant, so I thought I’d get a priest to conduct the funeral, and when I found one, he told me I owed the church thousands of forints in taxes which my mother hadn’t paid for decades.” Another person opined that “priests have come to enjoy the high life again,” or “there are more churchgoers today than ever before but I think it’s just hypocrisy.” Another group of non-believers appeared more tolerant to religious people, and the churches. They stressed the importance of religious freedom, and what a liberating effect it had on churchgoers, old and new alike, in the last 10 years. “Believers have more freedom and opportunities to practice their religion today.”

All religious and non-religious survey subjects thought of religious sects at the mentioning of smaller churches in Hungary. “I consider Catholicism and Protestantism the only real religions,” or “these small religions take advantage of people’s desire to belong,” or “these Hare Krishna people recruit kids right in front of the schools with their dirty little tricks.” The above quotes demonstrate quite well what people think of the new religions. “The teachings of these cult religions break families and society apart. I find Satanic cults and those eclectic, apathetic new age religious movements which tell you that ‘you are God yourself, you can do anything’ extremely dangerous.” We also encountered a few opinions which held the new religions in high regard. “I like the fact that these Congregation of Faith people have decided to help the gypsies. At least a few of them will mend their ways,” or “religious congregations can help people out in times of crisis, and they are definitely more helpful than going down the pub.”
4. Women in politics

Most interview subjects, including men, save a few skeptics, thought the involvement of women in politics extremely important, both at the level of national and local politics. People mentioned empathy, social sensitivity, sensitivity to women’s issues, and increased attention paid to family and educational affairs as important assets of female politicians. “I is important to involve women in the decision-making process as society would not be complete without them, and they can represent issues which men wouldn’t even think of,” or “more women should be elected to Parliament because they know our interests, and have an innate capacity for compromise.” A female political career has pitfalls too as men do not take women seriously, and make it difficult for them to become successful in politics, our interview subjects argued. “Men exploit women, and criticize them all the time,” or “women should get more involved in politics,” or “You ask us all these questions for the survey... why don’t you consult us before a new legislation?” One individual indicated that it was easier for women to undertake a political role at a mature age, “Madeleine Albright plays the diplomatic role of a man, but she is well-suited for such a role considering the natural age she is at.” Another person remarked that “it was more of a disadvantage for the family if the mother undertook a political role because she wouldn’t have any time to spend with the children.” Another individual voiced total disillusionment with politicians: “It makes no difference whether it is a man or woman; the only thing politicians care about is how to fill their pockets.” Many people mention that the family is most likely to suffer if a woman chooses the political profession. This is, indeed, why a female politician needs all the support she can get from her family. The electorate does not care about the gender of the candidate, all they are interested in is party affiliation, personality and political aptitude. “Attitude is what matters.”

We also asked our interview subjects who their favourite female politicians were. (They would not have told us themselves unless we specifically asked them.) Most of the favourites were Hungarian politicians, but a few foreign names came up too.50

VII. Ethnic problems and their social interpretation

The question whether there were any ethnic problems in Hungary prompted an affirmative answer from virtually all individuals, save those who remarked that their particular village did not have any ethnic problems at all.

The abstract question was interpreted by the vast majority of survey participants as a question referring to the Roma in Hungary, while another group mentioned Jews and Swabians as ethnicities causing problems. Another group referred to the Ukrainian and Russian mafia as particularly problematic. Ethnicity in the last two cases took on none of the positive connotations of ethnicities, such as linguistic and cultural diversity, but only the negative ones, i.e. “they” are different from “us”.

50 We found that socio-economic status had no real bearing on the names mentioned, therefore we will simply list the names in alphabetical order: Mrs János Bányász, Gabriella Béki, Judit Csehák, Ibolya Dávid, Ildikó Lendvai, Magda Kovács Mrs Kósa, Ildikó Pécsi, Erzsébet Pusztai, Gabriella Selmeczi, Mrs Szöllősi, Mrs Albright, Mrs Clinton, Mrs Thatcher.
It was mainly the Hungarian Roma that survey subjects described in detail under the heading of ethnicity. Of all non-Roma focus groups, only three groups had a positive view of the Roma: the group of female executive from Budapest, retired women from rural towns, and men from the countryside thought the Roma industrious and decent people whose culture ought to be preserved at all costs. They regretted the prevalence of negative prejudice against the Roma, and that ambitious and educated people were equally afflicted by it. The men described them as good trades- and businessmen.

The other focus groups characterized the Roma in the following way. The Roma:
- are all thieves or scam artists;
- do not work either because they are unable to find employment in lieu of skills and educational qualifications, or because they do not want to work, preferring to live off benefits and taxpayers’ money;
- have too many children because they are careless about family planning, or give birth to „strategic” babies to be eligible for multiple child support (some people feared that gypsies would soon outnumber Hungarians)
- are all criminals, even their children are criminals
- unpleasant and loud people who do not make good neighbours (wherever they start building a house, the value of the neighbouring houses will plummet).

Even the above individuals admitted that it must have been difficult to be Roma in Hungary, that they have been trying for decades to fit into Hungarian society -without any real success, and that they are treated as second-class citizens by Hungarians, mainstream society even tends to ostracise them. Their origins hamper their employment chances, and they are discriminated against at the workplace too.

Stigmatization starts at a very early age which makes it practically impossible for the Roma to break out of their difficult social situation. They are also unfamiliar with the bureaucratic systems of Hungarian authorities. It was mainly members of female focus groups who enlisted the disadvantages of being a Roma in Hungary, as well as conflicts deriving from them. Men simply acknowledged the problems without further interpretation.

The advantages of being a Roma in Hungary produced a heated discussion in most focus groups. Female executives from Budapest disputed the benefits of positive discrimination in the case of civil law disputes for the Roma, while female entrepreneurs from the countryside mentioned that they would ecstatic to receive as many privileges as the Roma do in Hungary.

Apart from the above groups, most survey subjects believed the privileges the Roma had were of a financial nature, that they were awarded a healthy amount of social support by the municipalities which they did not spend on what they were supposed to (i.e. they spent it on alcohol instead of clothing), that they would be given council flats before other people in need (e.g. jobless individuals from rural areas), and that even those individuals drew a financial allowance who did not need it at all: „they
drive to claim their social benefits, and order the most expensive tombstones for funerals.”

The Roma focus groups illustrated the existence of ethnic conflicts with a number of examples: „Being Roma is a 100 percent handicap when applying for a job,” say unemployed Roma individuals who live in a town where, due to the collapse of the steel industry, the vast majority of Roma have lost their jobs. „People do not consider us trustworthy, and look at us with suspicion, and in the employment register there is bound to be a letter „R” next to our name,” or „Nowonder the Roma lose all self-esteem in a society acting contemptuously towards them.”

According to Roma men from the countryside, the only advantage stemming from such an under-privileged social position is the extra motivation to study and do well in life. Roma women brought up the idea of inter-marriage as a possible solution to ethnic conflicts, but quickly dismissed it after a short discussion which revealed that this option was conflict-ridden too due to differences in gender roles. Every member of society had to do a little bit to make progress in resolving the Roma question, they concluded. A few individuals argued that the success of resolving the above issue depended on the majority, that is on the Hungarian Parliament, Hungarian teachers and parents. Another person suggested that the Roma and Hungarians should meet more often to get to know each other better, and to stop the transmission of harmful prejudices. The success of the above suggestion does, however, hinge on a society more open than the Hungarian society of today. Roma men would amend the Minority Act and propose a Roma Act too, while Roma women wished to campaign for an Anti-Racism Act.51

Female members of the Roma focus groups stressed the importance of education from the earliest age, while men argued that one had to educate oneself to jump-start the changes, a process which may have started already. It was also the male members of the group who initiated a society-wide campaign to resolve the Roma question, so that the Roma would finally be considered Hungarian citizens of equal rank with ordinary Hungarian citizens. As someone put it: „It’s not one’s fault that one was born a Roma.” A number of Roma self-governments were established a few years ago to widen participation in the democratic institutions of Hungary, but the licences of the above institutions were not as generous as those granted to municipal self-governments. None of the Roma focus groups mentioned these institutions, only the group of female entrepreneurs from the countryside thought them a promising start.

Only a small number of non-Roma focus groups proved unwilling to devise solutions for the Roma question - because they thought change was impossible. Even those who never encountered the Roma issue in practice had ideas on how to make a few changes. Unfortunately, the vast majority of suggestions were quite similar in nature with prejudice-fueled, emotional, racist and jingoistic overtones. Young and middle-aged professionals constituted the only exception in that they called for a society more tolerant and open: one which is able to integrate the Roma through education and the improvement of their financial status. All in all, they proposed a society which

51 The Hungarian Constitution declares the equality of all Hungarian citizens.
would "accept differences on multiple levels." Virtually everyone agreed that a solution to the Roma question would have to be a society-wide undertaking. Some individuals thought it ought to involve everyone is society, others reckoned it was a task for the state authorities. There was wide-spread agreement that a radical change in attitude was needed, but the words "if they don’t assimilate, we’ll ostracize them" implied that the Hungarian majority expected such a radical change of attitude on the part of the Roma only.

Our interviews also revealed the explicit desire of the Hungarian majority to curb the rights of the Roma, as well as the government’s current practice of positive discrimination: most of our non-Roma survey subjects would do away with the current system of automatic social benefit-provision to Roma families, and make it conditional on the employment of the claimant. The same individuals would make it mandatory for the Roma to accept jobs of even the lowest calibre (if they were unemployed), and make the provision of family support conditional on the enrollment of Roma children in primary schools. The above individuals would also prefer the Roma to invest in their own culture, and for wealthier Roma individuals to support their less well-to-do fellows, furthermore, they thought that the Roma should set up their own foundations to administer aid to the neediest families, and enforce the positive aspect of a Roma identity, in other words, they should try to check the attempts of militant factions of the Hungarian Roma community at stirring aggression in society. Furthermore, Roma self-governments ought to pay more attention to their duties, and less to their rights.

Some participants also suggested that such criticisms should not always be dismissed as a cheap form of racism. According to some of the most extreme opinions, all the Roma should be separated from Hungarians, or rounded up and shipped off to another country, maybe to ghettos set up for unwanted minorities.

Attempts of the older generations to justify the above suggestions by borrowing examples of harsh minority treatment in the European Union were countered by the unprejudiced remarks of younger men who thought "that all men were born equal, and should, therefore, be treated equal."

We find it important to add that the mass emigration of Slovakian and Romanian Roma to Canada and Finland was headline news in most Hungarian newspapers at the time of the survey, a fact which may explain, but cannot, of course, justify the deportation suggestions made by the above individuals. Discussing the main handicaps of being a Roma in Hungary, surprisingly, no member of the Roma focus groups brought up the issue of high unemployment, or the related issue of training opportunities (although most group members were jobless themselves). They did not mention the issue of abusive treatment by the Hungarian police either, an unfortunate phenomenon which created quite a stir in the foreign media. On the other hand, leaders of Hungarian Roma organizations did point out the first signs of ghettoisation and some other factors which were making it increasingly difficult for the Roma to feel at home in their own country.

VIII. The experience of the male control groups
In the framework of the survey, we interviewed a number of men on the same issues set out above. The goal of these interviews was to compare the answers given by men and women, and determine how subjective, i.e. gender-specific, or objective, i.e. matters on which opinions were identical, the phenomena described by our male and female interview subjects were.

A considerable number of issues prompted similar, if not identical, answers from women and men alike. Such identity of opinion usually concerned the mere existence, but not the qualities, of phenomena, in other words, both women and men, save a few inevitable exceptions in both groups, acknowledged problems deriving from the dual role of women, the employment difficulties of women with (or without) children, the difficulties related to having children in Hungary, and the inadequate functioning of the social net in Hungary. Furthermore, both groups agreed on the negative, deteriorating trend of changes in the status of women in Hungary.

We found that questions on the family division of labour prompted very similar answers from members of the two groups. A few men expressed opinions which we expected to hear from women primarily, e.g. the main social function of women being the management of the family household. These men were the ones who expected hot food on the table when they got home from work. Naturally, some other men took their equal share of the house chores. We tried to emphasize both „extremes” so as to prove that the phenomena which our female interview subjects recounted did actually exist in real life - according to both men and women.

We found it particularly interesting that most male interview subjects admitted what many women had already told us, namely that they might turn to alcohol if they lost their jobs (although this confession emerged in the form of a joke in most interviews). Many male subjects confirmed that they found it particularly important to live up to the traditional image of the man as head of the family, and that their ego would suffer a real blow if this role was in any way damaged. Affirmation of traditional gender roles is expressed most markedly in the following view held by a man: „I is important for women to get involved in politics for they represent a more sensitive approach to issues, and can suggest new ways of looking at certain questions, but at the end of the day, it should always come down to men making the final decisions.”

We detected considerable gender-related differences in opinions relating to the Roma in that men felt a lot less emotional about the issue than women did (at the time of the survey).

All in all, men confirmed most views held by women - either by describing the same (objective) phenomena, or by expressing subjective, gender-specific, views which confirmed the (objective) existence of the given phenomenon from a male perspective.
Chapter Three: Typical Social Problems and Female Careers in the Past 50 years

“I am not content but I have come to terms with my destiny.”

While the focus group discussions show clearly the effect of transition to the lives of women in Hungary, in-depth interviews help to understand better the contexts – the way of thinking, the way of acting of Hungarian women. We feel especially important the effect of historical events to the fate of our interview subjects.

History: losses and changes

Due to the age composition of the group, two-thirds of interviewees had personal, while one-third of them had indirect (parental), experiences of World War II. Among the parents of interview subjects, one would find survivors of the holocaust, war veterans, victims of the Soviet gulags, as well as an aristocrat who the communists stripped of all his possessions, title and privileges after their occupation of Hungary. Some of our interviewees lost their land or property in the collectivization/nationalization process initiated by the communists. Their children often suffered the consequences of a „privileged social position”; as offsprings of kulak peasants, or being „alien elements” in the working class society of communist Hungary, they would stand a very low chance of being admitted to secondary schools run by the state. In the late 1950s, the children of intellectual parents would never get into university on the first application; they would have to work for a year as manual labourers to be considered for a place. Meanwhile, a world of opportunities opened up for those from a working-class or peasant background, but not for everyone. The weaver, being the youngest child in her family, had no option but to start working at the age of 14, while the school-porter was the first in her family to graduate from high school.

At the same time, the 1950s saw enormous social mobility in Hungarian society, a phenomenon in which mass education played a key role. It was in this period that the parents of most 30-40 year-old interview subjects were promoted to managerial positions in state companies, trade unions and agricultural cooperatives. However, most interview subjects tended to recall the abject poverty and extreme hardship of the period between the end of the war and the 1960s, and not the benefits of social advancement. The retired teacher was born into a working class family who lived in a tiny bedsit which they had to share with the grandparents and an aunt too: „two people slept in every bed,” the teacher remarked. The weaver had never eaten meat before her wedding. The forced collection of peasants’ moveable assets made all forms of economic planning impossible, while the forced migration of individuals tore entire families apart, thus causing real damage in the fabric of society.

The majority of older interview subjects suffered quite considerably during the Stalinist terror of the 1950s. The retired teacher was expelled from the communist party because she disapproved of the latest wave of policies punishing the agricultural sector.
Those working in public administration remembered nothing but the extremely unpopular directives they had to communicate to the public. A public administrator, faced with the wrath of the public every day, informed us that it was only the words of wisdom his father imparted to her which got her through these hard times.

It was the revolution of 1956, with all its atrocities and reprisals, which caused the above generation to “grow up”. The teacher’s husband was sent to prison. The public administrator recounted all the physical atrocities perpetrated in the very building of the local council: “I was terrible to see it happen, a real mental trauma, but one couldn’t do a single thing to help. We all learnt the lesson that you save whatever you can... you don’t save your neck, but others who you can help.” Considering that the communists robbed her family of all their possessions, the disadvantages stemming from her non-working class origins, and the frequent interference of politics in her life, she seems fully justified in saying that “it will take a long, long time for values to be reinstalled to their proper place in society.”

Our objective with the above historical analysis was not to answer all questions historic, but rather to illuminate the historic background of citizens’ attempts to fight, or assimilate to, the system, and also to shed some light on the range of roles and methods available to them in this particular quest.

**Family patterns**

In spite of the abject poverty, and the intrusion of politics into the private lives of families, most interview subjects reported that they had a „happy and exciting” childhood, and -although their parents had very little money-, they believed they were given „everything that I child could wish for.” However, one must also admit that the picture depicted by the interviewees above was somewhat sketchy. Children born after the war rarely ever saw their father (who may have died, divorced his wife, or emigrated to another country) which practically meant that they did not see their mother too often either as the mother, being the only bread-winner left in the family, often had to venture quite far away from the family to get a job. In the early 1950s, the father of one of the interview subjects was in prison, a mother had to accept the most menial of jobs, another mother was forced to leave the country, while the only exception was another father who had the time and opportunity to educate himself in this period. In the above period, a Roma mother from the poorest county of Hungary was only able to get a job in Budapest which meant that she had to leave her baby in the care of her older sister during the week.

It was always the legendary grandmother who helped out in such broken families, and who, through her altruism, had become the role model for an entire generation of young people. The grandmother was described by all interview subjects as a most generous person always ready to help, a person who can prepare the best dishes out of a few ingredients, and whose conduct of life set the standard for a whole generation.

Those who inherited the grandmother model of behaviour (the specialist teacher, entrepreneur and sculptor) reported the following: „the woman, upon becoming
a wife and mother, will have to see to these functions using the best of her abilities, yet she will also have to try and excel in her profession."

The dual role of women is well-represented in the above model of behaviour, a fact which grandmothers often substantiated in practice by making enormous sacrifices to enable the emancipation of women in their families. Such sacrifices were even more apparent in unbroken families, particularly in families where both parents had low qualifications and jobs which enjoyed a very low social prestige. "Both my parents wanted me to do better in life than them," the English teacher said. "I was sent to all these extra-curricular classes although my parents did not have that much money," the political decision-maker told us. The mother in such families was likely to do anything for her daughter to make it to higher education, a phenomenon probably related to the historic tradition of educating sons only.

"My mother had six brothers and sisters, but only her youngest brother was sent to school. My mother-in-law wished to become a seamstress, but her parents did not think it necessary to send her to school to do that. Now she is good at knitting, crocheting, weaving and spinning, but she also had to get a job, so she ended up doing unskilled labour in a factory until she retired," the English teacher reported.

Children from families with two professional parents saw a more complex behavioural model, a model which integrated the value of education with that of working even in periods (e.g. the 1950s) when a life devoted to physical labour was most actively encouraged. We noted that mothers with low qualifications accepted the career choice of their daughters without objection, while professional fathers, and those in executive positions, sought most actively to influence the career choice of their daughters. A veterinary surgeon father did not think his profession would be suitable for a woman, and a lawyer father thought his daughter would never be able to make a living as a teacher, but he also tried to talk her out of becoming a lawyer due to the political injustices he suffered in his career.

The father who was made a manager by the communists insisted on his son choosing the same career, namely a career in food preservation, the political decision-maker told us. According to an earlier analysis, members of the 40-50 year-old age group picked professions recommended by their fathers. All in all, the families in our sample seem to have made it quite clear to both son and daughter that studying was important in life. This conclusion seems to apply to all interview subjects, i.e. to those individuals too who had to quit studying either because of their unfortunate origins, or due to a lack of inter- and intra-generational mobility in society.

The family division of labour in families with two parents took on the following characteristics in the cases we investigated:

- all mothers had a job;
- the mothers devoted their lives to the well-being of the family, an undertaking which they vowed they would continue to the day they died;
• some of the fathers did no house chores at all, others offered a bit of help here and there (mainly in the kitchen), others again (the intellectual father) lived his social life.

A few of our interview subjects named the father as the figure who was successful at „communicating to other people” outside the family: one father employed in an agricultural collective was the local employment administrator; the vet father was nice to people, and also optimistic and modest, and „he would always listen to other people’s problems;” the lawyer father was socially sensitive: a champion of the poor; the restaurant-owner was sly and resourceful, and talking to anyone, he would always get what he wanted. The children of these fathers were all told „to study and keep your rooms tidy.”

With the exception of families where the mother had a job too, it was always the father who made decisions in the family - although the mother would also have a few tricks to influence the father’s decision. On the basis of the above examples, we may venture to conclude that, without regard to the educational qualifications of parents, our interview subjects saw the model of a „general service-provider mother”, and that of an authoritarian father in working class families, and that of a liberal or at least less aggressive father in families where the parents had higher qualifications.

The core values transmitted from the older to the younger generations tended to be part ahistorical: e.g. integrity, honesty, love thy neighbour, precision, consistency, shrewd income management, etc., while some of the other values reflected the political reality of the times: endurance, desire to survive, getting up with renewed vigour after continual failures. One interviewee held the following view on the ability to compromise:

„If one always objects to everything, one will never get anywhere. One must decide when it is worth the confrontation, but if one can’t change things, one should try and get the best out of the situation. One should weigh up the pros and cons of things, but one should never cease to be honest and virtuous.”

The building blocks of identity

Enquiring about opinions on femininity, most women used analogies, rather than give straight answers. As can be seen from the above chapter, women in Hungary are expected to become wives, then mothers, and they are expected to love, indeed, devote all their time to their families. Yet, not one individual could tell us what biological or emotional processes made women more suitable for the above role than men. A few women never received any compliments from their mothers, therefore they assumed that they must have been boyish (as opposed to their older sisters who were both prettier and more mature), while some women reached the same conclusion because they preferred to make friends with boys in their childhood. Looking back on the 58 years of her life, and realizing the constant asymmetry of her desires and opportunities, the chemical researcher-inventor concluded that she would have been happier had she been born a man. The one interview subject who described puberty as absolutely
tormenting blamed her problems on the (Freudian) repression of certain issues in her family. She did not find puberty disturbing because she did not know what was happening to her (her girlfriends at school told her everything she needed to know). She found the process distressing because her physical maturing often prompted unwelcome remarks in her family which made her feel humiliated. Furthermore, she could not share her problems with anyone else for such issues were a taboo in her family. Her family made a few fleeting and impersonal remarks on her sexual maturity which seemed wholly off the mark in light of what she told us:

I got married at the age of 19, but not as a virgin. The night before the wedding, my granny came over to tell me a few things about „married life”, and to prepare me for the „terrible experience” ahead of me. I was so embarrassed, I wished the ground would swallow me up. [We asked her about relationships, to which she replied:] I want love in my relationship as that is the best thing one can get in life. I’ve got all the love I could wish for as mother and woman, and slowly, I also realized that I was master of my own body -for I had no information before- so I took my chances. I find it extremely important for women to live their lives as a woman, and not just a mother, for they can’t be happy otherwise.

The suppression of issues was a key element to the success of the communist system, and not only when it came to the issue of sexuality. Two Jewish individuals told us that they had to find out they were Jewish from kids in the neighbourhood (as they were not told so by their parents). Disadvantages stemming from one’s origins can have an adverse effect on one’s identity as a woman too. Such handicaps may have caused women to search for new identities, to follow behavioural clichés and patterns (of the woman, wife and mother) inherited from the older generations as opposed to developing their unique identities. The above problem, i.e. such a deficit in women’s self-identity, stands in stark contrast with the typical male pride of the husband, which manifests itself in most relationships in an overt or covert fashion, ready to blow up the marriage at any given time. In a few cases, strong rural traditions can add another edge to the situation:

„My husband is an agricultural engineer working in a village, therefore we had to make a decision on where to settle before we got married. I wished to stay in the city, but he said he would prefer to move back to the village he was born in. This would not have been a problem for my parents” generation because as my father-in-law put it: „it is the man who brings home a wife, and not vice versa.” Fortunately, my husband did not insist on his family traditions, and accepted my proposal for a game to list arguments in favour of both locations, and whoever had a longer list of arguments would win. My list turned out to be longer, so we stayed in the city,” says the young teacher.

Our interview subjects thought that mothers could impart words of wisdom to their children too. The weaver brought up her son „to study, respect his parents, establish a long-term relationship with the girl he loves, marry the girl if she got pregnant, and not to get divorced, unless necessary.” The political decision-maker informed us that she „would
bring up her son to respect women, and treat them as equal partners. If the younger generations accept this premiss, the position of women is much more likely to improve in the future." The entrepreneur voiced the following desire:

I hope both my sons will try and recreate the life they had at home in their own families, and will, therefore, choose partners with whom they can work and live together in harmony. Both sons will expect a proper household because that is what they had at home, but this may cause a few conflicts in their families. ...I wish I could stop myself wanting to intervene in their lives, in their marriage, and the way they bring up their kids... but I just couldn’t bear to see my grandchildren staring at the telly all they long with a stale burger in their hands.

The chemical researcher, who did not think it was possible to reconcile the role of the professional with that of the mother, reported that she “did everything one ought to do in the household... still, my children did not have a proper family around them.”

A wife held the following view on mothers who had a son:

I am starting to notice that women are proud to give birth to a person who is different from them, who has got something extra. True enough, little boys are often more sensitive and touchy than little girls. Later, this may become an advantage as the boy might think: my mother gave me all the love she had, I will try and pay the same attention to my wife.

Women at school and the workplace

It was teachers primarily who seemed content with their choice of profession (a profession which is now completely dominated by women), but the chemical researcher and the sculptor also expressed satisfaction with their respective jobs. The above individuals credited their parents and enthusiastic teachers with the success of their careers. Unfulfilled desires did not have much to do with the female gender of the individual, but seemed all the more connected to the disadvantaged origins of the individual, as well as the rigidity of the political system.

The majority of women did not think it was a disadvantage to be female at the workplace, but the following examples indicate the opposite. “Women have to work three times as hard as men,” says a retired civil servant. “Only one”’s performance counted, but women always got transferred to departments where they could easily be replaced,” says the agricultural entrepreneur. “I always felt more like a man - I had obligations to my family,” says the weaver who did not suffer any particular injustices because she did night shifts, stoically accepting her Jolly Joker function, i.e. being moved around from one machine to another, bearing the 90 decibels of noise 8 hours a day, walking 45 kilometers a day from machine to machine, in other words, she accepted any work condition offered by her employer.
Some others did feel the disadvantages of being female at work: „I took me an extra 10 years to become a manager just because I was a woman. I met obstacles everywhere,” says the chemical researcher. „I didn’t get anywhere, it is a definite handicap to be a single woman - I get no respect from other people,” says the Roma economist. The political decision-maker thought it was difficult to get ahead in life being single.

The English teacher told us the following story:

When I went back to work after being away on maternity leave, the principal of the school greeted me with the following words: „We are happy to have Mrs E back who decided that she was ready to work again after a 5-year break.” I also noticed that my male colleagues missed a lot more school-days than I did, and if they were offered a better job, they would quit straight away. Thank God, a new principal replaced the old one 2 years ago, and she is a lot more understanding (maybe because she is a woman): I am not terrified any more if my child takes ill, and I have to tell her that I will take a few days off to stay home with him.”

The researcher had different views on this matter:

I think women were the victims of full employment in Hungary. Many women only got a job because their husbands” wages would not have been sufficient to provide for the family. One of my colleagues could never take her mind off her house chores: she would be thinking about what to make for tea, she would pop out to do the shopping, or phone home to make sure her children did their homework - all this while she was working, supposedly. She was a mother full-time, and a wage-earner part-time.

„There is nothing worse than two female managers: two manly women will not tolerate each other,” says the political decision-maker. Some of the interview subjects mentioned the conflict between women’s self-identity and desire for self-assertion, at least when it comes to the role of the mother. A few of them resented not having spent more time with their children when they were young.

The majority of women in our interview sample made career progress by their own initiative, relying on their own or the family’s networking capital. Female entrepreneurs trying to get into the catering business before 1989 or after 1990 followed the example of their entrepreneur husbands. It was these female entrepreneurs and the husband of the English teacher who obtained land and real estate in the compensation and privatization programs launched in the early 1990s.

One should not discount the role of pure luck in the career decisions of individuals. Chance luck is the positive side-effect of professions whose future is incalculable. In other cases, the inability to make decisions can cause a continual change of positions, incongruent employment decisions, etc. (the case of the mechanical engineer). The bank administrator provided the example of a most disturbing conflict between legal clauses on equal opportunities and the reality of employment: she was made to sign a paper that she would not have a baby for two years if she accepted job. Our interview
subjects believed there was quite a considerable difference between male and female labour power as women were more conscientious, considerate of others, accurate, creative, had a better logic, and were better organizers than men. „It all comes down to curiosity,” they opined. As entrepreneurs, they were more cautious, and risked less than men. Those women who did not have a university degree had an overpowering desire to excel in their careers. On the other hand, as women get older, their drive to excel in their professions gets increasingly overshadowed by their fear of aging. Similar to members of the focus groups, our interview subjects agreed that it was close to impossible for women over 40 women and handicapped women to get a job in Hungary.

The principles and practice of family life

The majority of interview subjects had either been married once, or was still married at the time of the interview. A few married out of love, others drifted into the relationship, others again decided to get married in a weak moment, trying to get over a past relationship. A few parents did not allow the marriage to go through for religious reasons (the fiancé was Lutheran), others merely tolerated an unwanted marriage because „one has to make one”s own choices”; other parents simply warned their child „not to marry an alcoholic”. Because relationships were not in the focus of our interviews, a few details must have remained in the dark, just like in the actual relationships which we investigated to some extent. The researcher only realized half way through her marriage that her strong personality attracted the „artist types” who all wanted to live off her. Others did not about their partner’s previous lovers who eventually came back to break up the relationship. Other interview subjects adopted the model from their own families, and acted subserviently to their husbands, a method which worked in a few marriages, and failed in others (where the husbands eventually separated from their wives to find more emancipated and younger partners). In one marriage where the wife decided to put her career ahead of the traditional role of the wife, the husband filed for divorce, and moved in with a more subservient woman.

In a successful marriage of ten years, the intellectual wife had the following criteria in mind when searching for a husband:

_I had no real expectations concerning the looks of my man, but I wanted someone reasonably attractive-looking with a positive karma, with something special about him. It was the other criteria which I placed more emphasis on: I wanted someone who had a broad variety of interests, a good sense of humour, and was considerate to other people. Someone who was not fickle, did not drink or smoke, and had a similar upbringing and education. I wanted someone who wasn”t selfish, showed understanding to my problems, and was honest and patient with me. That”s all I wanted, and then I found my husband who fit all the criteria. I think I made the right choice._

We found five marriages in the sample in which the spouses were real partners, providing safety and security to one other while also letting each other live their lives in
relative freedom. In these cases, freedom meant more than leisure time, it meant freedom to discover oneself and explore new things with the full support of the other. We found both rural and urban couples who fit the above bill.

In other marriages, the (re)creation of peace and harmony in the family was a duty for the wife. The most men would do in such families ranged from „nothing” through „he might make a cup of tea if I ask him really nicely” to „he might give me a hand doing work around the house”. In such families, the grandparents often had an active role to play in the family division of labour. In some of the above families, it was due to the traditional co-habitation of three generations, while in others, it stemmed simply from unfortunate housing conditions.

In a few families, decisions would always be made by the two spouses, while in others, the importance of the issue at hand would decide which party could make the final decision in the matter. A few interview subjects proudly declared that they made all the decisions in the family, while others contented themselves -quite diplomatically- with the „right to object” to the husband’s decision. The issue of money, i.e. the amount of money to be spent on the household, was usually decided by the wife, while more considerable investments, e.g. buying some household appliance, a car, or a flat, would prompt a joint decision. An entrepreneur husband would have preferred to invest every penny the family had in property and moveable assets, while his wife would have preferred to live it up now. The husband then decided to „shun the conflict”, and thinking his wife would not consent to him buying land and animals anyway, made the decision by himself.

The number of children came up only twice in the interviews. A wife who wanted a third child after 1989 was turned down by her husband.

House chores were considered a burden, and decisions a necessary evil, by single individuals and by OAPs, but a grandmother helping with the chores could ease the problems quite significantly. Assets like a new car which other individuals acquired in joint with the partners, constituted a more momentous achievement for single individuals. Financial decisions implied an economizing approach to life, indeed, sacrifice for single individuals and OAPs alike. It is, however, quite understandable for a 60-year-old pensioner taking 27 different types of medication a day, and whose life savings have been eaten up by various life-saving operations (the weaver).

Turning points: the regime change of 1989

Enquiring about major events and turning points in the lives of the interview subjects, most people mentioned personal traumas. Losing one’s father caused a real mental, and occasionally physical, trauma for four people, while the fatal car crash of an interviewee’s husband, as well as separation from their husband caused similar personal traumas in the life of other interviewees. History as turning points featured in the lives of two individuals only: it was the revolution of 1956 in both cases. The events of 1989 prompted answers like: „we didn’t think it would ever happen,” or „it can’t be true it happened in our lifetime” from individuals who expected the most from
the new political setup. An older interview subject added that „we were given all this freedom a bit too late; we spent most of our lives in a closed society.”

The youngest interview subject lost her job due to the regime change of 1989, and was forced to work as an agricultural day-labourer on other people’s farm and in his own vineyard although he had secondary school qualifications. „I had a more secure life before the regime change, with a more secure future,” lamented the 31-year-old who did not experience a single positive change in the last 10 years.

The regime change coincided with significant changes in the life of the English teacher: she graduated from university, found a job, and got married around 1989. „I can’t really draw a line between what would have happened anyway, and what happened due to the regime change. One things is for sure though. If the political system hadn’t changed, there would have been no compensation program, and we wouldn’t have a plot of land now, or farm, or savings in the bank. However, our life may be slightly more peaceful if things hadn’t changed. The status of women has changed too: more women are appointed to executive positions which is great, of course. On the other hand though, there are more broken families around, and less people decide to have children today.

The group of middle-aged individuals who lived the largest chunk of their working life in the previous system thought that it was easier to be a mother in the previous era. The well-functioning network of child care institutions, as well as the advanced system of child and family support encouraged people to have children, and made motherhood more viable and pleasant. The above middle-aged interview subjects recalled that more people followed a righteous lifestyle, admitting that it was easier for most people to carve out a decent existence if they worked hard. „Back then, poor people drove a Trabant, and rich people drove a Lada. The difference between rich and poor wasn’t as apparent as it is today between a homeless individual and a person driving a Mercedes convertible. “Wages earned back then made it possible for most people to go holiday in Hungary (which the government also subsidized), a simple „necessity” which people would have to work a lot harder for today. The pitfalls of the previous regime included the petty lies, the dreaded police force of the Kádár administration, the myriad regulations which rendered all forms of creativity, innovation and a career impossible. The weaver added: „I did not have great ambitions, but those little ones I had I could not realize.”

What changes did the regime change make?

First and foremost, it gave us „freedom”, opportunities, a creative spirit, and the desire to make things happen. „We were delighted to kick the Russians out of the country, that we could vote as opposed to casting a ballot in a rigged election, and that we could freely express our opinion.” A few individuals mentioned the benefits of the younger generations growing up in a free society. However, opportunities are not offered to everyone on a golden plate: only those can take advantage of them who have multiple skills, multi-utility qualifications and knowledge and a wide range of expertise.
The entrepreneur considered the regime change of 1989 the element of a process of transition: those who had started up their enterprises before 1989 found that things became progressively easier after the regime change. The agricultural entrepreneur thought it a missed opportunity to stick to her job in 1989 as opposed to starting up her business right after the political changes. The back administrator maintained that those people got the most out of the change of regime who had had a bit of capital, and a good business idea, to start with.

The Roma economist described a trend of ongoing deterioration in the situation of women and the Roma in Hungary. The life of old age pensioners has not changed that much: it was, and still is, extremely difficult for pensioners to live off the pensions which the state provides to them.

On the other hand, the changes did have a few controversial effects too. People feared the secret police in the previous era, now they fear the taxman. People were aware of the ubiquity of the police in all aspects of life, a fact which protected society from crime. Most people agreed that the appealing state of public safety, with stories of murder, robberies and break-ins becoming every-day news, as well as the rising level of unemployment were the most negative consequences of the liberalization of society. The deterioration of public safety was interpreted by most interview subjects as a sure sign of the entire political system spinning out of control, while no improvement in labour market statistics could convince our interviewees that the issues of unemployment and homelessness showed have finally started to show signs of positive improvement.

Things have become more complex and incalculable recently, says the entrepreneur. Others mentioned that the economy was still over-politicized, and that politicians responsible for the regulation of the national economy still failed to consider the immanent laws of economics when making decisions on the economy. The agricultural entrepreneur mentioned that the current practice of agricultural production by smallholders was inadequate for both Hungarian and EU markets, further that the agricultural support programs perpetuated a structurally deficient system, making farmers concentrate on survival, and not development. He argued that it would carry a lot more benefits to return to the system of agricultural cooperatives.

Economic planning is hindered by the ever-changing directives set by the government, furthermore, interest rates are too high for entrepreneurs to get a loan. "As an entrepreneur, one gets the impression that no politician is paying attention to one”’s real problems."

The current distribution of Hungary”’s knowledge capital did not corroborate interviewees” views on the importance of education and qualifications. Intellectuals earning wages or salaries noticed the devaluation of their knowledge and qualifications in relation to both expertise marketable in the labour market, and also the lack of expertise (which did not seem to hinder the accumulation of wealth of certain individuals). Everyone seemed irritated by stories of individuals hoarding up „undeserved” riches without a matching input of labour. Others again noted a declining trend in reading, and a growing trend of violence in the media.
The retired teacher argued that ideologies still ruled the day: she found the ubiquity of Christian propaganda a bit sickening. Other found the mandatory membership of entrepreneurs in the Chamber of Business a solution alien to the concept of democracy.

Our interviews revealed that the majority of citizens lived quite an unpolitised existence until 1989. A few people used their professions „to practice politics”, while others joined the underground opposition movement either in secret or quite openly. Most people, even those sympathizing with the opposition, thought of the regime change of 1989 as an event generated by others: it was the retired civil servant only who remembered 1989 as „something great which You could participate in, and add a little bit to.”

Women have not shed their distrust of politics, a phenomenon accompanied by a critical attitude of all things political. „The power-craze, and politicians’‘jockeying for positions, seem extremely harmful to society,” or „hypocrisy and lies will not make politics any more attractive to the average individual,” and „I don’tlike a lot of things in this new system, which is why will try to withdraw to the peripheries,” or „I see no political culture: politicians should exercise a bit more self-control and self-discipline instead of quarrelling all the time.” Participatory democracy meant party politics to most interview subjects. Some individuals voiced a desire for nationwide cooperation, a thought which prompted special thoughts instantly: „private interests will always prevail over the long-term interests of the nation.” The researcher informed us that she „always loathed Hungarians bickering and moaning all the time about everything without as much as lifting a finger to change a few things. I, however, tried to change things when I had the opportunity.” The magazine editor thought that NGOs and civil lobbies would be able to change a few things in society.

„We must assume responsibility for our own destiny,” the interview subjects agreed, knowing that such an effort would remain utopian for many years to come.

Three-fourths of interviewees had no strategy to do anything about the issues mentioned above: they expected others to develop such strategies. They all agreed that women should be able to decide whether they wanted the career of a professional, or that of a homemaker. Job-creation and popularization of the atypical method of employment were suggested as methods to curb unemployment in Hungary. On the other hand, interviewees decided that the last 10 years constituted a period of day-to-day conflict-resolution to every one of them: some of them struggled to make a living, others attempted to maintain their previous standard of life, others again embarked on wholly new careers, while a few individuals merely changed a few aspects of their professional career. However, no failure-handling or success-building models have emerged yet, opined members of the interview group. The adaptation/survival exercises alienated people from politics, while also developing newer, more attractive methods of relating to politics.

At the end of the interviews, we asked our interviewees to name three wishes they most desired to come true. We received the following replies, answers which
should provide an interesting addendum to the desires, dreams and values expressed by our interview subjects.

**The three wishes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First wish</th>
<th>Second wish</th>
<th>Third wish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Depart this world after a life of virtue, honesty and love</td>
<td>I wish to be active until the day I die</td>
<td>A small family house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discover myself in a well-paid job</td>
<td>Health for myself and my loved ones</td>
<td>Peace and harmony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace</td>
<td>Love for humanity</td>
<td>A flat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>A long life</td>
<td>Travel around the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>A calculable life</td>
<td>Stabile economic directives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find balance in pleasurable activities</td>
<td>Preserve my current safe relationship</td>
<td>An environment conducive to long-term planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher pension</td>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>Sport</td>
<td>Travel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A secure financial state</td>
<td>Health</td>
<td>Support for my parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>Peace</td>
<td>My children obtain degrees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May the magazine live on forever</td>
<td>Healthy grandchildren</td>
<td>I wish my husband to be content and happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loan for entrepreneurs at a discounted interest rate</td>
<td>I wish to be 20 years younger</td>
<td>Peaceful life, more leisure time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter Four: Needs and Recommendations

As can be seen from the labour market surveys set out in previous chapters, the departure of women from the labour market began in 1989. This process had a differential impact on women from different branches of industry, of different age groups, professions and educational qualifications.

Although growing demand for people with higher qualifications did improve the overall quality of the female labour force, it simultaneously marginalized those parts of the labour force with the lowest, or no, qualifications and skills. For others, the above process implied the forced adaptation to new labour conditions, a phenomenon unaccompanied by appropriate opportunities of further training or employment.

Entrepreneurship meant an exciting new opportunity for many people, and soon the number of female entrepreneurs doubled. Quite a significant proportion of the new enterprises set up by women were established under the threat of unemployment: furthermore, the conditions under which these individuals undertook all tasks related to self-employment were appalling, especially in the first years of the decade.

The emergence and dramatic growth of unemployment in Hungary took a Hungarian population used to decades of full employment by surprise. The loss of one’s job often meant the simultaneous loss of one’s existential security, self-esteem and dignity. Although some of the old-new ideologies of the new democracy offered to women the opportunity to become homemakers, indeed, full-time mothers again, the conditions necessary for such a decision were missing both from families used to the dual-earner model, and also from the structure of a national economy which has only just taken the first steps towards establishing a welfare state.

The above changes had quite a significant impact on families too. The pace of a few trends inherited from the previous era, such as the breaking up of multi-generational families or the growing number of broken families stemming from a rising number of divorces, accelerated quite considerably in the post-1989 period. Crisis trends became more salient and numerous compared to the well-known trends of rapid population aging, and declining birth rates which had diminished the ratio of the economically active population to dependants in society in the previous era. In counties suffering the worst extremes of the economic recession, the demographic hazard became a private affair in many families, particularly in families where both wage-earners lost their jobs from one day to another.

The anomia between declared principles and praxis was quite apparent before 1989 too, and it caused significant damage in citizens and values alike. The changes of the 1990s exacerbated the above described anomia, the phenomenon which lead to the deterioration of public safety, the diffusion of deviant behaviour, and the total impoverishment of social classes merely endangered before.
Although the new achievements of democracy and freedom, as well as the reinstitution of basic civil and human rights liberated many people from four decades of communist repression, such joys were far from total or universal. The new political system distributed its fetters just as liberally as it did its newly-found liberties.

In the focus group surveys, women were asked to assess the changes that took place since 1989. Their controversial nature of their answers may have stemmed from a number of factors: first, the men-preserving family division of labour inherited from previous eras was left unchanged, while it drastically reduced the number of social institutions available to women in need, thereby increasing the amount of time women now had to spend on running the household. Although the rate of female unemployment was lower than men’s, the above phenomena of a loss of self-esteem and dignity in the case of employment probably applied to women more than it did to men.

According to members of the focus groups, the situation of women generally deteriorated in the period of transition. Chief element in this trend was the insecurity deriving from one’s loss of traditional employment. The issue of new challenges and opportunities rarely ever came up in discussions for women were too busy discussing the “seven misfortunes”. The new state was measured with a dual scale: it was considered good because it was not dictatorial anymore, and bad because it was not paternalistic anymore. The problem-solving crisis came to afflict citizens without a proper division of labour between the state, market and nonprofit organizations, and in lieu of a proper network of background institutions to help them out in times of crisis.

The caring state (which was not so caring after all), or at least, the illusion thereof, was still a living reality for most people. This may be one of the explanations why interview subjects gave us situation-contingent answers to questions on their problems. Too many changes seemed to have taken place too fast, and people seemed lost without stability and positive behavior models to follow.

All problems of our interviewees seemed secondary, save the issues of motherhood and marital partnership, compared to the basic problem of existential insecurity. Unfortunately, none of our interview subjects could give us reflexive answers on the above situations of crisis. The historic background, as well as the heart-rending life stories of individuals made it all the more understandable why there was complete bewilderment when it came to handling crisis situations.

Unfortunately, we could not detect any signs of coherent strategic thinking in the answers of participants of the focus groups, either in case of in-depth interview groups, when we asked our interviewees to identify three wishes they most desired to come true.

In some answers appeared those material values as wishes – own flat or house – which for most western women was not difficult to achieve even decades ago. Other - very natural - wishes aimed the improvement of their life and work conditions. We have received important signals about the dependency of generations on each others, wishes
to live a “whole” life. Comparing our answers with the findings of former studies, there is a significant increase in the appearance of non-material values, like peace, happiness, love, humanity, self accomplishment. Additionally, there are wishes about a more peaceful, quiet ad healthy life, with more free time, travelling, sport instead of the present stressful and exhausting pattern. A wish from fairy tails – trip around the world - was only mentioned by the youngest interviewed – she is able, and courageous to name dreams.

Recommendations to handle the problems mentioned above:

The basic condition of personal security is employment which is why most individuals envisaged the creation of new jobs as the only panacea to current employment problems. A relatively large proportion of individuals wished to be employed part-time, offered flexible time schedules, or work one could do from home or by proxy. Jobless individuals would be happy with „permanent temping jobs”. Those who had jobs mentioned that they desired harmonious working conditions, a varied work schedule, kinder superiors, and maybe a bit of moral acknowledgment for the work they perform. The preservation of the real value of pensions was repeatedly emphasized by all parties interviewed. Finally, the above problems came up in the form of a wish too: interviewees wished discrimination by gender, age and the number of children would not occur at work any more.

24 focus groups maintained that a family needed money, while 8 groups thought that it needed existential security and jobs, to be better off. One can construct a more ideal macro- and micro-level image out of the individual „puzzles of opinion” where the welfare state provides support, inflation ceases to exist, prices become stable, taxes start falling, loans become accessible, employment gains more social recognition and employers are regularly checked on their practice of employment, education becomes cheaper, medical services get a discount price, public safety improves, the built environment becomes tidy again, regional differences cease to exist, problems get resolved locally and not centrally, private life gets separated from politics, and people get on OK in life out of their own efforts.

In the opinions of focus group members, a more harmonious world ought to provide the background to family life, the guarantees of which are provided are by an understanding partner, love, consideration for the other and trust. Conditions would improve through the acquisition of new, or the renovation of old, flats. One individual’s desire to study prompted the answer that he dreamed up a grammar school for his village. Another individual would feel better if she was married, and another two people thought their lives would be full if they had a baby.

In light of the innocent idyll depicted above, one may think the above interviewees described an over-romanticized version of the late-Kádárist period, and it cannot be explained away with the argument that 10 years was too short for people to change their attitudes.

According to a report published by the Central Statistical Office, 25-30 percent of the population live below the subsistence level, individuals who are quite highly
represented in the sample population of this survey. All focus group discussions and interviews registered arguments lamenting the dissolution of society, as well as the growing impoverishment of a large section of society. The vast majority of recommendations made by the above individuals targeted the economy. People agreed on the need for a more stable economy which is regulated by better indicators, a more efficient anti-inflationary policy, and tougher import restrictions. Accessible loans and subsidies for innovative approaches should facilitate the adoption of state-of-the-art technology in the industries. Wages ought to rise to the „European level”, and men ought to make enough to provide for the family by themselves, members of 10 focus groups contended. Other people thought that „if Hungarians bought Hungarian products, our jobs could be saved.”

Listing causes of the above problems, a few individuals did manage to find scapegoats: „with privatization, the entire country was sold off,” or „foreign employers exploit the Hungarian worker,” or „it was those billions of fronts which the government spent consolidating a few banks, and the widening of the „agra-scar sissors” which rendered it uneconomical to cultivate the land.”

The over-politicization of the economy was also mentioned as a cause of economic instability, therefore fewer political parties, less MPs, and shunning the rotation of parties in power could provide a political solution to the problems of the economy. Some individuals mentioned the lack of interest-representing organizations, strong lobbies, and trade unions representing the interests of workers as a factor in the ailment of the economy.

The over-centralization of decisions was also criticized, and according to the principle of subsidiarity, local problems ought to get resolved at the local level, our interview subjects opined. The current practice of confrontational politics ought to be replaced with consensus-oriented politics. Women also expected more attention from politicians after the elections are over for most politicians never realize their promises. „The government should do what it promised, and should communicate to the common man too.”

It was probably due to the strong influence of politics on the media which prompted the suggestions that a more value-oriented printed media and TV would serve the population better than soap opera morality. TV, in its American format, destroys communication in society, they reckoned.

Establishing the frameworks of the constitutional state involved the creation of too many new pieces of legislation. Indeed, this is what may have prompted the desire for a less complex, more transparent system of law, and the accessibility of free legal information. The protection of minority rights, and the necessary creation of new legislation was stressed again by a few individuals. Intellectuals wished to see a fairer system of law which extended even to those who made their fortunes in fraudulent ways, and one that could control the spending of public monies.

Social recommendations targeted those groups within a two-thirds-dominated society which have come to be at risk quite recently. Other suggestions targeted the preservation of support programs for people with children, and that of the family
allowance program, furthermore the development of a new support regime for single mothers and OAPs, the creation of a well-functioning social net which extends to the poorest, the most needy, the homeless, and those on income support. Interview subjects reckoned that the current money-oriented society ought to be replaced with a person-oriented society in which NGOs would have a crucial role to play.

One can detect social differences in the cultural problems which make books, theatre performances, and the movie theatre inaccessible to a large chunk of the population. However, most proposals concerned the improvement of the educational system. People expressed a desire to spend more money on the entire sector, vocalizing their dissatisfaction with teachers, the quality of public education and the general openness of the educational system (which fails to provide equal chances to children from different social backgrounds.)

All welfare claims concerned the provision of free, or at least cheap education. The change in the curriculum our survey subjects wished to see was the inclusion of women’s and family issues in the standard curriculum. The range of problem-solving methods resorting to anti-globalization, populist demagoguery ended here, the only desire interview subjects expressed was that honest, virtuous expert politicians should administer and carry out the above policy recommendations.

The issue of women came up only a few times „in its own right.” „Maybe we should undertake to represent issues of value-transmission and the environment ourselves?” or „Why don’t women plant trees together?” asks the questions a female entrepreneur.

We heard frequent demands for a free choice between work and family. According to the political decision-maker, „Women would get the most help by being given a free choice to decide what they wanted to do with their lives.” However, such a suggestion had grave financial implications.

If the husband provided for the family, the woman would not be forced to work, and could make a free decision whether to work or have a career. If her living conditions allowed, she should all the opportunity to study, change jobs and move around freely. I think this question has more to do with finances, and less with regulation.

The above recommendation fills an important gap in that it is the liberty-oriented, woman-centered manifestation of all values introduced by the regime change of 1989.
Appendix B

Characteristics and locations of the Focus Groups

Women

1. 18-30 year olds, City
   • Physical labourers – Putnok, Borsod county
   • Unemployed individuals – Békéscsaba, Békés county
   • Young employees, starting their careers – Szeged, Csongrád County
   • Economically inactive individuals – Nyíregyháza, Szabolcs-Szatmár county
   • Middle-level professionals - Budapest

2. 18-30 year olds, Village
   • Roma workers – Arló, Borsod county
   • Physical labourers - Ózd vicinity, Borsod county
   • Young employees, starting their careers – villages in Zala county
   • Economically inactive individuals – Nyírtelek, Szabolcs – Szatmár county
   • Middle-level professionals – Pusztamérges, Csongrád county

3. 31-55 year olds, City
   • Roma unemployed – Kalocsa, Bács-Kiskun county
   • Unemployed individuals - Budapest
   • Political decision-makers - Budapest
   • Managers - Budapest
   • Entrepreneurs - Budapest
   • Economically inactive individuals, on child care allowance - Budapest
   • Physical labourers – Kazincbarcika, Borsod county
   • Professionals – Pomáz, Pest county
   • Individuals with large families - Budapest
   • Women living alone (single, divorced, widows) - Budapest

4. 31-55 year olds, Village
   • Economically active – employees and family farming– Szeremle, Bács-Kiskun county
   • Unemployed individuals – Nyírtelek, Szabolcs – Szatmár county
   • Local political decision-makers – women mayors on villages of Zala county
   • High level professionals - villages in Veszprém county
   • Entrepreneurs - vicinity of Szombathely
   • Economically inactive Romas - Abony, Pest county
   • Physical labourers - vicinity of Békés
   • Professionals – Besenyőtelek, Bács-Kiskun county
   • Individuals with large families – Pilis, Pest county
   • Women living alone (single, divorced, widows) – Nyírtelek, Szabolcs –
Szatmár county

5. Over 55 years of age, City
   • Pensioner, former physical labourer – Miskolc, Borsod county
   • Pensioner, former professionals - Veszprém
   • Economically active - Békéscsaba

6. Over 55 years of age, Village
   • Pensioner, former physical labourers – Csongrád county
   • Pensioners, former professionals - Veszprém county
   • Economically active - Balatonalmádi, Veszprém county

Male control groups

• 18 - 30 years old middle-level professionals – villages, Pest county
• 18 – 30 years old young professionals, starting their career - Budapest
• 31 – 60 - Roma, economically active – town Kalocsa
• 31 – 60 – permanently unemployed individuals – village Nyírtelek
• 31-60 – managers - Budapest
• 31 – 60 - Entrepreneurs – villages around Szombathely
• 31 – 60 – High level professionals - Budapest
• 31 – 60 – unemployed, earlier physical labourers - Budapest
• 31 – 60 - Top managers – town Békéscsaba
• 60 - pensioners, still economically active - Budapest
## Appendix C

### Characteristics of the focus group discussion participants

#### Breakdown of the participants by qualification

**Females**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Individuals</th>
<th>% of the sample</th>
<th>% in the population of Hungary*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary school or less</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>64**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational school</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational secondary school, grammar school</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>360</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 1996 data  
** including those who graduated from vocational school  
*** including university graduates

**Males**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Individuals</th>
<th>% of the sample</th>
<th>% in the population of Hungary*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary school or less</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>67**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational school</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational secondary school, grammar school</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No of individuals</th>
<th>% of the sample</th>
<th>% of the Hungarian population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living with someone</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>no data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widow</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No of individuals</th>
<th>% of the sample</th>
<th>% of the Hungarian population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living with someone</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>no data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widow</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour market position</td>
<td>Female (individuals)</td>
<td>Female %</td>
<td>Male (individuals)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pensioner</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inactive</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Breakdown of the sample based on the labour market position of the participants**

**Breakdown of female respondents by regions and educational qualifications**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regions</th>
<th>Maximum elementary school</th>
<th>Vocational Education</th>
<th>Secondary school</th>
<th>College, University</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individ. %</td>
<td>Individ. %</td>
<td>Individ. %</td>
<td>Individ. %</td>
<td>Individ. %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Trans-Danubian</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budapest and Environment</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North, North-East Hung.</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Plain</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D

Responses based on gender of the respondents

Opinions about changes in family division of labour, based on gender (individuals)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female (N=360)</th>
<th>Male (N=89)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does it create change in family division of labour if</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- the husband becomes unemployed</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- the woman starts working</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- the woman has higher income</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- the woman becomes involved in politics</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- the woman starts a business</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- the woman becomes unemployed</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Evaluation of some circumstances of child rearing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female (N=360)</th>
<th>Male (N=89)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you agree with the following statements?</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial support of families is satisfying</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers with children have enough job options</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial support of mothers with children is satisfying</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutions of child care are satisfying and accessible</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutions of protecting mothers and children are satisfying</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational costs of children are acceptable</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of public education is satisfying</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Evaluation of specific obstacles and sources of tension by women (N=360)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How have changed from 1989</th>
<th>Improved</th>
<th>worsened</th>
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<td>Equal rights of women</td>
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**Evaluation of specific obstacles and sources of tension by men (N=89)**

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Appendix E

Focus group outline

Focus group discussion starts with greeting of participants and self-introduction of moderator. Ask for permission focusing the tape-recorder.

Introduction of the group – basic data about themselves and if they have, their husband: last employment, education, profession, family status, number of children.

Ice breaking question: What did it mean for them to be born as a woman?

I. General problems

1. What were the most important problems effecting women in the period before the transition?
2. What are the most important problems effecting women now?
   2.1. The problems women faced equally effect them in general, or are these typical for specific counties or only for their home places?
3. What are the reasons of the mentioned problems?
4. Which mentioned problems effect you personally?
5. In your opinion since 1989 the women’s status
   ▪ improved
   ▪ worsened
   ▪ stayed on the same level?
   Please explain the reasons:

II. Obstacles and sources of tension on specific areas

1. What constraints do you see in
   ▪ Women finding employment
   ▪ Education of women
   ▪ Continuous education of women
   ▪ Legal protection of women
   ▪ Roles of women in public life
   ▪ Social care of women
   ▪ Legal rights, legal equality with men?

   *Please focus on the cultural, ethnic, political, legal, social and economic aspect of the constraints as well

2. In your opinion on the above listed areas how is the present situation related to the period before 1989?
III. Family life – raising children

1. How do you remember the roles of women in your family, what were the responsibilities of women of your mother, grandmother?

3. What are the responsibilities of women in the family now?

4. What is the method of division of labour in a family between the couple?

Who does the chores at home? How many hours do you spend with housework a day, a week?

Who looks after the children, and how many hours does it take?

What is the reason of the present practice in your family?

Ask divorced women how did they share housework and child care in their marriage, and how did they cope with the lack of presence of their husband from this aspect?

Who help them now?

5. Did it bring changes into division of labour in the family if
   • The husband became unemployed?
   • If the woman starts working?
   • If the woman earns more?
   • If the woman has a political position?
   • If the woman starts her own business?
   • If the woman became unemployed?

What happens in these situations?

6. What does it mean for families now in Hungary to have children?

Please characterize
   • the financial support from government to families with children
   • job opportunities of women with small children
   • support of women with children
   • child care institutions
   • institutions for mother and children protection
   • costs of education of children
   • level of public education.

IV. labour market options for women

1. Has labour market options for women

   • Improved
   • Worsened
   • Stayed on the same level.
**Who are satisfied with their jobs and why?**
Who are unsatisfied and why?
What solutions do you see to improve the present situation?

2. Do/are the members of the group
   - work in position fitting to their educational level
   - satisfied with their career options in their working place
   - are their wages equal with men in the same position or more, or less?

**What legal solutions can you see to solve the above mentioned problems?**

V. Relations, economic status and the consumption of individuals living in a single household – role and possibilities of women

1. Who became new property owner (land, assets, etc.) in the last ten years?
   - Has privatization provided new opportunity for them?
   - Has compensation provided new ownership options for you?
   - How effected the above mentioned issues other family members?

3. Who were the main beneficiaries financially (having new property, etc.) of the change of regime?
   - Was it gender related?
   - If yes why?
   - If not what other aspects were characteristic in this process?

4. Intra household dynamics – who make budget decisions in the family?
   - If the husband, why?
   - If the wife, why?
   - If together, what is the reason of it?
4.1. Do the roles undergo changes if
   - the woman has her own income? How?
   - If the woman became unemployed?
   - If the man became unemployed? What kind of changes happened?
4.2. In their opinion would it be an asset for the family and society if they stayed home as homemakers?
4.3. Who does regular shopping in the household?
   - Husband – Reasons
   - Wife – reasons
   - Other family member - why
   - Other non-family member – why
4.4. What would they provide to their family members without question?
4.5. What are their priorities in consumption?
4.6. What consumer goods or activities participants have had to give up in the last ten years?
   - For themselves
   - For the family
4.7. What the new system made available in the last 10 years for participants?
4.8. What do they consider as luxury? (goods, activity, etc.)
- For themselves
- For the family?
(If they do not mention, moderator ask about coffee, cigarette, alcoholic drinks, designers cloths, etc.)

VI. Health and its role in the life of the participants
- What does health mean for you?
- To protect your health, for prevention, do you consume vitamins or other non-prescribed over the counter products?

VII. Coping strategy
1. Being aware of the characteristics of the group, ask the following question: Have you ever thought what would you do if your partner lost his job, or became ill, or other unexpected undesirable event disrupted your and your family’s life?
- Moderator, please list the answers on the following way: Unexpected event – who effect it: the participant - other family members – What would be your action?
- Do you have idea or experience what kind of strategy you would use in solving a crisis (ffecting your personal life or career, etc.)

VIII. Which family member benefit more from the marital contract?
- After the marriage which member of the couple will own officially the property (house, second house, car, etc.)
- Who suffer the most in a divorce financially in the family? - man or woman, explain your opinion and please tell examples.

IX. Violence and abuse, shelter and polity
1. It is a common opinion that women are more and more effected to violence, aggression (moderator, please include not only sexual issues, but others like abuse, theft, robbery as well).
- How much do you agree the above?
- Please tell examples if you agree.
2. Have you experienced violence in your family?
3. Who, what institutions might help in the above stated situations?
4. What have you heard about the effectiveness of the helping organizations?

X. Religion
1. What other solution could appear in your life in crisis situation? (moderator, if the participants do not mention the religion please bring it up carefully)
- What is the role of religion in your life?
• Have you experienced changes in religion as issue in the last ten years?
  • If yes, what were the direction and content of the changes?
  • What are your opinion about sects, and how much information do you have about it?

XI. Ethnic problems

1. For non Roma groups: Are there ethnical problems today in Hungary?
   • What do you see as possible solutions?

2. For Roma groups: What does it mean for you being Roma in Hungary? Can you see advantages or disadvantages in it?

XII. Women in politics

1. In your opinion, is it important that women would be represented in politics in preparation making of public decisions?
   • Who are actively involved in politics from the participants?
   (Moderator, please wait for the spontaneous examples, only afterwards ask who are members of political parties or local governments, etc.)
   1. Are the group members satisfied with representation of women in politics?
   • Did you have a choice during elections between women politicians and male politicians?
   • If yes, or if now the answer is not but later maybe yes, what would it be the basis of your decision when you would select between man and woman?
   • Do you have favorite woman politicians? Who? Why?

XIII. Entrepreneurship

1. Turning back to the change of the regime, in your opinion has it brought new opportunities for women?
   • If yes, please tell what are these?

2. Who use entrepreneurship as a new option from you?
   • Who were forced to start a business?

3. Are there participants employed by private enterprises?
   • What kind of differences can you see between the new employers (private companies) and the formers?

XIV. The role of the non-profit sector in the life of participants

1. Do you have contacts with non-profit organizations?
   • If yes, please list them
   • What can these organizations offer to you?
   • Do you participate in the work of non-profit organization, voluntarily or any other way?
   • If not, in what conditions would you help in their work?

XV. Recommendations
1. Finally, I would like to ask what would you need so as your family would be able to live a better, more proper, “full” life?

2. What institutions do you expect assistance for fulfill the above mentioned needs?

3. What do you recommend to solve the problems came up during the focus group discussion on
   - Social
   - Cultural
   - Legal
   - Economic
   - Political

solution?

*Thank you for answering.*