

National Report Hungary

Socio-economic trends and welfare policies

Deliverable 3.1 – November 2006

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Quality is an innovative, quantitative and qualitative research project that aims to examine how, in an era of major change, European citizens living in different national welfare state regimes evaluate the quality of their lives. The project will analyse international comparative data on the social well-being of citizens and collect new data on social quality in European workplaces in eight strategically selected partner countries: UK, Finland, Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, Hungary and a candidate country for EU enlargement, Bulgaria.

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Introduction

This deliverable is part of Workpackage 3. ‘Analysis of the Institutional Context for the project Quality of life in a changing Europe’. Its purpose is to provide the necessary contextualisation for the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data which would be gathered in the Quality project. It builds upon the work already done in the project: Deliverable 1.1. ‘Literature Review. Theoretical Concepts and Methodological Approaches of Quality of Life and Work’ and Deliverable 7.1. ‘Gender Checklist’. The reports in this collection present information about macro level trends in order to interpret research findings on the meso level (that of the companies under investigation) and the micro level (the values and lifestyles of individual employees). Other reports will examine existing data sources on objective and subjective indicators for the quality of life (D 1.2.) and offer comparative cross-national analysis (D 1.3.). Here we focus on the institutional framework in terms of resources and challenges in front of the quality of life in each partner country involved in the Quality team. The concrete objectives of this exercise were:

- To map current socio-economic and demographic trends concerning changes in work, employment patterns, institutional structures and practices of human resources management, family life, community and leisure, with an expected impact on the quality of life;
- To examine trends in public policies regarding employment and family life related to work-life balance;
- To get insight into the way different policy regimes stimulate or restrain quality of life.

Each report presents the major concerns and opportunities for the quality of life in the national context and makes an attempt to evaluate the impact of the national policy regime (the combination of social rights and services delivered by the state, the market and the family) on the quality of work and the quality of life. The time frame of the analysis is the last ten years. Where relevant, reports refer to major policy and economic changes in a longer time frame, as is the case of the two post-communist countries Bulgaria and Hungary which explore employment, demographic and policy trends since the regime change in 1989. Gender, as well as class (social status) and age (life course), act as the main cross cutting factors in the analysis.

The national reports made use of the following main sources of information:

- statistical data provided by the national statistical offices, Eurostat or other agencies;
- official documents of the national governments, programmes and reports of various ministries and non-governmental organisations;
- research reports and academic publications of national and international sociological agencies, research centres and universities;
- reviews of public debates in the media concerning quality of life and the policy measures deemed necessary to address the challenges;
- consultations with stakeholders and experts from the academia, policy makers and practitioners in the partner countries.

All national reports have similar structure in order to ease the task of international comparison which will be addressed in the next stage in Deliverable D 3.2. ‘Combined comparative report on socio-economic trends and welfare policies in the partner countries’. The reports’ introduction addresses the strategic

topics of national academic and policy debates about quality of life and most pressing issues in each country. The first chapter analyses significant trends in the economic activity patterns and population developments from the mid 1990s to the present and the prospects for the near future. The issues covered are activity rates by gender, age and education, patterns of employment, self-employment and flexible work, unemployment, trends in retirement, disability, sickness, family transitions and fertility rates, diversity of family forms and trends in social inequalities. The second chapter explores the employment policies in the country and elaborates on the patterns of social protection the state is providing for its citizens. Discussed are labour market, unemployment and self-employment policies, programmes for flexibility of work, measures for life long learning and safety at work, wage policies and the practices of social dialogue and their impact on the quality of work. The third chapter focuses on the trends in family policies and the kinds of provisions there are for maternity, paternity and parental leaves. This section of the reports examines the models of care policies (primarily for children but also for other dependents) and family friendly measures offered by the state, employers, community and wider families. It also includes a brief presentation of the significance attached to trends and challenges in health, housing, and leisure policies and policies for the safety in the community and society as a whole, and how these affect the wellbeing of citizens. The conclusion contains the authors' evaluation of the influence of policy interventions (current and in the past ten years) on the quality of life and quality of work and the prospects for the future.

The national reports in this collection represent countries selected before the start of the project with the understanding that they correspond to the main policy regimes. Thus Finland and Sweden have social democratic welfare states, the Netherlands and Germany stand for the corporatist regime, the UK represents the liberal regime and Portugal – the sub-protective regime. Hungary and Bulgaria are post-communist countries moving away from the centralized one-party regimes and are currently combining elements from all the four models above. The ongoing changes in their policy systems make it unclear which welfare regime they are moving toward. However, as the reports attest to, transformations are underway in all other countries under the influence of demographic and economic changes, new technologies and globalisation. Which model of citizenship best provides for the quality of work and life is to be further explored in the course of the study.

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Executive Summary

Hungary has undergone vast changes in the past 16 years, as it moved from a planned to a market economy, from a single party- system to a multi-party democracy. Just about every aspect of social, economic, and political life has been transformed. The analysis below starts with a description of demographic changes and a renegotiation of the structure of the family, pointing to a sharp drop in birth rates and marriage rates, as well as an overall trend to postpone childbirth. The proportion of children born out of wedlock has increased drastically, contributing to changes in family formation. Hungary's population is aging and declining.

Employment rates are overall low in Hungary, with a high proportion of people classified as inactive. This is especially problematic for the population over 55, where activity rate is significantly lower than that observed in other EU countries. Younger people's activity rate is also lower than in the EU, which is due to an increase in youth unemployment, as well as the legacy of a lengthy educational system from the state socialist era.

Social inequalities have increased sharply over the past 16 years: both along the dimension of class and ethnicity. Poverty has increased, especially relative poverty, and income inequalities increased, especially until the mid 1990s. Poverty rates are particularly high and unemployment rates quite low among the Roma ethnic minority in Hungary. There is strong discrimination against the Roma in almost all walks in life.

Social institution building in Hungary has been uneven: parties and parliamentary institutions developed relatively fast, and while NGO's, trade unions, and other associations proliferated, their influence on social decision making is limited.

Hungary joined the European Union in 2004, and economic, employment and social policy since this date have been shaped by EU requirements and directives. Most recently, in order to eliminate Hungary's vast budget deficit in a manner and at a pace amenable to EU policy makers, the Hungarian government introduced a long series of austerity measures, proposing to raise gas prices, increase taxes and tax related subsidies, introduce tuition at universities, co-payments at doctor's visits, etc. Mass demonstrations followed. Nevertheless, the government will most likely be allowed to introduce the austerity measures, which will surely lead to an at least temporary decline in real wages and living standards in Hungary.

1. Introduction

Hungarian society has experienced vast changes in all walks of social, political and cultural life since 1989, the fall of the last communist government. Change has been radical in some areas, but also slow and gradual, i.e. “path-dependent” (Stark 1996) in others.

In the *economic sphere* the most striking change has been marketization, the liberalization of trade, wages, prices and the currency, as well as the adoption of structural adjustment policies dictated by international agencies and happily accepted by Hungarian neo-liberal economists. The Hungarian economy fell into a deep crisis in the early 1990s, with GDP falling and inflation rates reaching almost 30%. But growth picked up in the mid to late 1990s, and per capita GDP at PPP stood at \$16,300 in 2005, which is about 60% of the EU-25 average and is the third highest among former communist societies after Slovenia and the Czech Republic. By 2006, GDP growth slowed and Hungary accrued a huge government deficit. The Socialist government elected into power for a second term in 2006 is in the process of introducing austerity measures to meet the requirements of the introduction of the Euro: restructuring state administration and cutting government spending, reforming health spending and raising taxes and other contributions, etc. These will lead almost certainly to an at least short-term decline in the value of real wages and an increase in unemployment as well as in social inequalities. It is hoped that the economy will stabilize by 2008-9.

In the *sphere of politics* change was similarly radical. In 1990 the communist party lost power and democratic elections were held after almost 40 years in Hungary. After an initial period of a proliferation of small parties, two major parties emerged and grew to dominate the political scene: a right-wing, conservative party (FIDESZ) with a slightly populist, socially conservative and nationalist agenda, and a left-wing party (MSZP), which calls itself social democratic, but, ruling in coalition with a small liberal party (SZDSZ), has introduced all the major structural adjustment schemes in Hungary. Elections are democratic and peaceful, and so far each government managed to finish the term it was elected for. For the past 5 years the Socialist party MSZP and their coalition partner, the liberal SZDSZ, have been in power, and they were elected for their second term in 2006. An important feature of the Hungarian political field is the weakness of non-governmental organizations, trade unions and other agencies, which may be able to represent people’s interests in a variety of areas. Hungary joined the European Union in 2004.

Change is harder to summarize in the sphere of society and culture. While there has been an emergence of alternative social and cultural forms since the 1990s, the most notable change is the increase in social inequalities to a point not seen in Hungary in generations. Class inequalities have become prominent over the past 15 years, with poverty on the rise, the middle class losing ground, and a relatively small elite enjoying economic success and security. Social and economic insecurity came as a novel experience for many people after decades of state socialism. While nowadays class inequalities in Hungary are smaller than in most other EU countries according to the GINI coefficient, the change from 1989 is vast and people are still adjusting. (Inequalities grew especially fast until the mid 1990s when they slowed and, some argue, have decreased slightly since.) In addition, as mentioned above, the government gives preference to what they call “economic development” over social justice, and non-governmental organizations are too weak to fight effectively for the downtrodden.

In addition to class inequalities, ethnic/racial inequalities have also become more prominent. Hungary's Roma minority has always been discriminated against and disadvantaged, but many Roma had reasonable, if marginal jobs in heavy industrial plants and thus could make a living. After 1989 these jobs disappeared, and lacking useful skills and isolated in remote and impoverished areas of Hungary (all the long-term result of state-socialist Roma policy), a large section of the Roma minority fell into dire poverty, coupled with little effort on the part of the government to curb discrimination and racial hatred expressed in increasingly open and violent forms.

Gender inequality, on the other hand, did not increase perceivably in Hungary – women have lost ground in the labour markets but so have men. What did change, however, is attitudes expressed about women's role in society, both at the level of policy making and among the general public. During the communist era the government had an ideological commitment to women's emancipation, to drawing women into the labour force and, at least in principle, fighting discrimination. After 1989 this notion was quickly eliminated and politicians as well as the Hungarian population would have liked to send women back into their kitchens, away from men's business in the field of paid work and politics. This was unfeasible in reality, as men's wages were not nearly enough to support families in most cases. Nevertheless, Hungarians still tend to hold the most conservative views about women's role in society (according to, for example, the European Social Survey), and although the Socialist government in power can hardly ignore the EU's Lisbon targets regarding labour force participation and nursery schools, there is little public support for the concept of 'equal opportunities' for women and men, and positive action and quotas are generally seen as illegitimate remnants of the communist past.

Social changes related to EU accession should also be mentioned. One example is the ongoing transformation of the educational system to conform to the Bologna process. This affects both higher and secondary education in the not-so-long run: the size, structure and mobility of students and professors. The restructuring of the educational system should contribute to a more mobile and flexible society – a phenomenon that is new to Hungary but is taking hold in the youngest generations. Another issue which dominates public discourse is the distribution of the EU structural adjustment funds, which Hungary will receive if it develops a satisfactory National Development Plan. Since EU legislation and priorities must be kept in mind, this allows for lobbying for issues, which are not high governmental priority otherwise, such as equal opportunity issues, environmental protection, etc. Finally, the importance of the EU in the economic sphere has already been mentioned. The fact that Hungary is not doing very well with preparations for the introduction of the Euro compared to other state socialist countries, creates political tension and serves as a way to legitimate policies, which cut back on social spending and reduce, at least in the short run, people's quality of life (for example, the recent introduction of tuition at universities and co-payments at doctors' visits).

In sum, over the past 15 years Hungarian society underwent probably more radical changes than most other countries in our study (with the exception of Bulgaria, of course.) The two major political events which shaped social and economic life in Hungary in the past two decades have been the transformation towards a globalized market economy and the accession to the European Union. These changes are ongoing and perceivable in every walk of life. Below we start with discussing demographic changes and changes in family structures, then move on to a discussion of the labour market and time use. In part 2-3

we discuss social policies: employment-related ones, as well as maternity policies and other social security reforms. We end with a brief conclusion.

2. Employment and demographic trends

Demographic trends, health status and family formation: births and population policy

Like other East European countries, the Hungarian population has reacted sharply to the social transformations and economic insecurity that followed the collapse of the communist political system in 1989. Although the number of live births had been declining since its peak in 1975, a sharp drop is observable after the early 1990s, when the consequences of the transition started to hit the population for real. By the mid 2000s, Hungary has one of the lowest fertility rates in Europe, well below replacement level, as well as the EU-25 average TFR (Total Fertility Rate) of 1.50 (in 2004). The decline stopped in the early 2000s and the birth rate, as well as the TFR, stabilized at a low of 1.32 (table 1).

Death rates by the early 2000s are higher than birth rates – the population is shrinking and getting older. This is a concern for Hungarian policy makers. On the political right, discussions about the birth rate are usually coupled with calls for a renegotiation of Hungary’s currently quite liberal abortion regulations, as well as blaming “career women” for selfishly focusing on their careers rather than staying at home and producing babies for the nation. The argument is different on the political left. Whenever demographers raise the specter of a shrinking population, left-wing policy makers make a half-hearted attempt at reforming the system of family benefits in order to compensate families for the cost of raising children. Tentatively, and mostly on the level of discourse, the idea that workers should receive help to be able to balance work and family is also raised. These discussions, however, remain at the level of political discourse; little is translated into actual political action, even less to financial subsidies and assistance. Recent research shows that despite the limited political support, in the past few years medium and large companies (especially multinational ones) have made attempts to introduce work-life balance measures, but these are limited in nature and are aimed exclusively at women (Delphoi 2006). The only pro-natalist oriented measure introduced by the left-wing Socialist party in power has been an increase in the universally allocated family allowance since 2001, but this sum is still far too low to work as an incentive for raising more children, and families in a context of economic insecurity are unwilling to take on additional burdens.

Families in transition

There have been substantial shifts in patterns of marriage formation in Hungary. These trends did not start in the early 1990s, but they accelerated and became more pronounced due to the overall insecurity and decline in living standards experienced by a lot of people. Marriage rates had been on the decline since the mid-1970s, and they stabilized at a relatively low level in the mid-1990s and have not much changed since then (table 2). The number of divorces have not changed, but given the smaller number of marriages, a higher proportion of marriages entered into today are expected to end in divorce (about 42%) than in 1990 (31%). Hungary has, after the Nordic countries, one of the highest divorce rates per marriage.

However, the most striking change occurred not in the number of marriages but in the age at which people get married: later and later (table 3). There has been a radical increase from a stable 22 years of age for women and 25 years for men, to almost 25 and higher at first marriage for women and 28-29 years for men starting in the early 2000s. While this is still lower than women's average age at first marriage in the EU-25 (27.2 years in 2002), this is likely to converge in the very near future. As a result, while in 1980, about 17% of women were single over the age of 30, in 2005 almost 60% are. In addition, of women in the 30-49 year old age group about 9% of those in relationships lived with their partners without actually being married, while about 41% did in 2002. This is a vast change, which has consequences for household formation patterns, birth rate, as well as consumer behavior and work patterns. The image of the "Cosmo girl", the single, professional woman enjoying her independence and searching, if not very intensively, for a suitable husband, is gaining popularity in Hungary, much to the consternation of right-wing conservatives.

As a result, women are postponing childbearing and are increasingly having children outside marriage. By the mid 2000s, women's average age at first birth exceeded 27.8 years, which is only slightly lower than the EU average. This represents a sharp increase from the mid-1990s, when women gave birth to their first children at the age of 25 on average.

Given the high divorce rates and late marriages, the nuclear family is less and less the typical household arrangement in Hungary. As noted above, a growing number of young women live alone. While in 1990 less than 30% of women between the ages of 15-49 were childless, by 2005 over 40% are. In addition, while in 1990, 86.9% of kids were born to married parents, in 2004 only 66% were, that is, 34% of children are born out of wedlock. Their parents may or may not marry later, but this represents a novel trend in Hungarian family formation.

In sum, since the mid-1990s Hungarians have significantly altered their reproductive behavior; fewer people get married and they wait longer to do so. People are more likely to get divorced, and to have children out of wedlock. Women tend to have children later and fewer children overall, leading to a decline in the size of the population. In addition, changes in child bearing and family formation patterns have further diversified the family arrangements people live in, and while the nuclear family is still considered ideal for all, most people end up living in a variety of other types of households much of their lives.

Health, ill health, death

The European Social Survey assessing 21 European countries found that Hungarians are more likely than anyone else to claim that their health is poor – this is true for both men and women (Nők és férfiak Magyarországon, 2004). Indeed, recent studies show that the Hungarian population suffers from a number of chronic health problems in increasing numbers. For example, about 30% of people smoke on a daily basis and about 13% are treated for depression. 17% of men drink alcohol every day, and the proportion of those dying of alcohol-related liver disease increased significantly since 1990 (it peaked in the mid-1990s, and started a slow decline, still not reaching its pre-1990 level). Maria Kopp has pointed out the extremely high death rate among men in the 45-55 year old age group. This is a relatively novel phenomenon, which she associates with the stresses placed upon men in the post-communist workplace (Kopp 2004), and one which has consequences not just for men, but also for women and children as well.

Overall, too, life expectancy in Hungary is lower than in the European Union (table 4), although its brief decline in the early 1990s stopped and a gradual increase is observable at the turn of the 21st century.

Education

Educational attainment has increased in Hungary, with growing access to educational institutions. This trend started in the mid 1980s in Hungary and accelerated in the 1990s. Between the early 1990s and 2000, the proportion of students in secondary school has increased from 20-32%, the proportion of students in secondary technical schools, providing vocational training increased from 27 to 39%. In 1990 about 37% of students in the relevant age group passed the maturity (high school ending) exam, while in 1999 over 54% did. This is due, mostly to an increased need for at least secondary school degrees in the labour market.

Along with the expansion of secondary education, the proportion of students enrolled in tertiary level institutions also increased significantly since 1990 (Lannert 2000).

Hungary is in the process of reforming its tertiary educational system to harmonize with the Bologna process. This is still in progress, and the outcome might reshape both enrolment numbers in, and the quality of university education. In addition, the new system may reshape inherent inequalities in the tertiary educational system. As the first BA's will only be awarded in 1-2 years and the MA programs are being accredited now, it is difficult to make predictions as to the shape the new system or its consequences may take.

Simultaneous with the increase in the proportion of students, the level of inequalities both among the schools and in the level of schooling attained has stagnated. 80% of children of parents with university education attend secondary school, while only 60% of children of secondary school graduate parents and 20% of those with vocational training only. These inequalities have not changed significantly over the past 10 years (Lannert 2000).

While women are more likely than men to get both secondary and tertiary degrees in Hungary, there are major problems with the Roma ethnicity. Roma children often attend low quality, segregated schools, drop out of school very early, or receive only elementary education and do not continue for financial or other reasons.

Access to Employment

Hungary has one of the lowest activity rates in the European Union (table 5). To some extent this is due to a lengthy education system, which keeps young people in school for a relatively long period of time as well as a very low retirement age, which is the legacy of the state socialist era (table 6). Before 1989, women could retire at the age of 55, men at 60. Although women's threshold is being raised slowly, currently the legal and especially the actual retirement age still has not reached the European average. Women on average retire at 58, while men at 62. Working for pay after retirement is less common, not only because of ill health and people's own choices, but also because employers are reluctant to hire older people. In addition, a reduction in the number of workplaces meant that those beyond and even close to retirement age were sent into retirement to protect the jobs of those in the active age categories. In the

early 1990s, “early retirement” options as well as “disability retirement” on very flimsy grounds were popular with employers and served as a way to avoid a rise in the official unemployment rate even though both these options meant financial difficulties for many in old(er) age.

An even more important reason for the low rate of economic activity is the disappearance of roughly a third of all jobs in the first few years of the 1990s, as Hungary made a transition from a planned to a market economy. Over 75% of women of working age worked in the mid-1980s, and this number dropped rapidly to around 50% in the early 1990s and has climbed slowly to 55% since. The size of the decline is similar for men, but their activity level is higher and no growth is observable: 68% in 2005 (table 8). It should be noted that the labour force expanded slightly in the mid-1990s and activity rates increased for both genders. The growth is quite small and represents merely an indication of the right direction of changes, rather than making a real difference in many people’s lives.

Economic activity rates are particularly low for older women (and to some extent men) over 55 years of age (see table 7). This is the legacy of the low retirement age pointed out above and is expected to disappear or at least be reduced in the future as subsequent generations reach retirement age. The reason why relatively few women in the 25-35 year old age group are engaged in the labour force is childbearing and Hungary’s generous maternity leave policies (which will be discussed later). Men between the ages of 30-34 and women between 40-44 are the most likely to be economically active. For women, this often represents a return to the workplace after long years on maternity leave.

If we examine the employment patterns (table 8) over time and the gender differences in particular, we find a similar pattern: a relatively low proportion of the population have paid jobs, only 44% of women and 58% of men do in 2005. These numbers fall quite short of the Lisbon targets of the European Union and do not show much improvement over time either. In fact, Hungary (along with Poland) has the lowest employment rate of all post-state socialist societies. Only the Mediterranean countries display similar patterns.

Nevertheless, until 2005 women have been less likely to be unemployed than men: their unemployment rate never exceeded that of men and ranged between 6-10%, while men’s moved between 7-13% (table 9). This is, of course, not because women had particular advantages in the labour market. Rather, women without jobs were more likely to classify themselves as inactive – looking after the house or bringing up children, or being retired or on disability pensions. This is an ideologically acceptable position for women, but not so for men. Youth unemployment and especially unemployment in the rural areas is a particular problem in Hungary: around 10% of young people (between 15-29) do not find jobs and about 15% among those between 15-24 (table 10).

In sum, due to an early retirement threshold, generous maternity leave policies and the disappearance of about a third of all jobs after 1989, activity and employment rates in Hungary dropped sharply in 1990s and are currently well below the European average. While small increases have been noted, these are slight and do not hold much hope for the fulfilment of the Lisbon targets by 2010. However, it should be noted, that even though women’s employment rate in particular is quite low, women who do work, tend to work full-time, unlike in most other Western European countries. Less than 6% of people work in part-time jobs, and thus work quantity counted in full time equivalent units reaches the European averages in

Hungary too. *Paid work, however, is done by a smaller number of people, and a large segment of the population is excluded from the labour force.*

Quality of Employment

The structure of employment also changed significantly over the past 15 years: service sector jobs increased in numbers (from 53% in 1992 to 61% in 2003) and the agricultural sector as well as manufacturing shrank in size (table 11). Nevertheless, there are still more people engaged in manufacturing in Hungary (33%) than in the EU-15 (25%), and fewer in the service sector (61% compared to 71% in the EU-15).

In terms of the occupational structure, managerial and professional positions, as well as routine service positions, have proliferated, while non-routine manual jobs, as well as skilled and unskilled manual positions, have declined. This is the typical pattern seen in post-industrial societies (table 12).

One phenomenon should be pointed out: there has been a vast increase in entrepreneurship and private businesses in Hungary since 1990. While in 1989 only 2%, by the early 2000s over 10% of men worked as private entrepreneurs (table 12). The numbers are smaller for women than for men, but the rate of growth is similar.

Another significant change is a reduction in the size of the companies people work for: 40% of all employed people in Hungary now work for micro-enterprises (employing fewer than 10 people), and only 30% work for large companies (employing more than 250 people). This is a significant shift since the late-1980s when most people worked for large, state-owned enterprises.

Occupational and sectoral segregation by gender has declined somewhat over the years, but Hungary still has a relatively high segregation index (59.5%), compared to about 55% in France and 46% in the United States. Women tend to work in underpaid sectors and within each sector in less prestigious, lower level jobs, leading to lower wages and career opportunities (Bukodi 2006, Pollert and Fodor 2005).

Real wages declined until the late 1990s, but started to increase thereafter and caught up with their pre-1989 level by the end of the 1990s (table 13). The increase was relatively steady in the private sector, but much more variable in the state sector. In the past few years real wages increased by about 6-10% (except for the year 2004 when they declined). Nevertheless, Hungary's real wages are still only a fraction (60%) of average wages in the EU-15.

Due to differences in work hours and discrimination in wage setting, women's wages are lower than those of men: women make about 80% of men's wages in the state sector and 85% of men's wages in the private sector (table 14). Sadly, the wage gap tends to increase at higher levels of education: among primary school graduates women make 95% of men's wages, while among college grads, only 74% (table 15). This indicates the tendency for professional women to settle for, or to be unable to move from low level, underpaid, routine professional jobs into managerial levels (table 12).

Working Time, work arrangements

Employed Hungarians spend more time doing their paid jobs than people in most Western European countries (Bukodi 2006). This is especially true for employed women, who spend more time working for pay than in any other EU country (about 1600 hours per year.) Above I pointed out that Hungarians' employment rate is lower than in most EU countries. This means that a lot of work is done by a relatively small number of people, unlike elsewhere where a similar amount of work is divided up more evenly in the population. About 5% of the population work overtime on a regular basis, and do an extra 10 hours per week on average. A surprising almost 3% is not getting paid for the extra work. Interestingly, women are less likely to do overtime work, and once they do it, they are less likely to get paid for their efforts (table 16).

Part time work is not popular in Hungary. Typically of former state socialist countries, a small fraction of the working population works part time (table 17). While in Germany, for example, over 37% of women aged 20-49 work part time, in Hungary only 4% do. This indicates the difficulty of combining work and family obligations: women either work and spend long hours at their jobs, or choose to drop out of the labour force altogether to be on maternity leave. Many of these women return to work after their (occasionally lengthy) maternity leave, but a significant number stay at home for extended periods either because they do not want to go back to work, or because their workplace disappeared in the meantime, or because high quality child care is unavailable.

Flexible work arrangements are also meagre (tables 18, 19). Only 2.5% of the employed population have a chance to work in a non-standard setting: 3.4% of men, and 1.7% of women. In addition, over 40% of men and women do not have the possibility to stay away from work for a day for family reasons. This clearly does not contribute much to either men's or women's ability to balance work and family obligations.

Women spend more time doing unpaid, reproductive work than men: about 300 minutes per week, compared to men's 161 minutes. While men spend more time doing paid activities, overall they end up having about 72 hours more leisure time a week than women. Overall, Hungarian women and men, but especially women, spend the longest time on unpaid household activities and childcare, compared to all other countries in the EU (Bukodi 2006). It is important to note that both men and women in Hungary hold quite conservative notions about women's place in society, the majority of the population claiming that women are best fit to be caring for family and hearth. It is not surprising therefore, that women, regardless of their occupational status, spend the same amount of time on housework: whether or not their job is considered of higher status than that of their husbands does not influence the domestic division of labour. Also, for women, it is not only having children that increases the amount of time spent on domestic chores: single mothers with children, whether they are employed or not, spend approximately the same number of minutes per week on household activities as those with a partner but no children (ibid).

Social Inequalities

As mentioned in the introduction, the rise in social inequalities is one of the most palpable consequences of the transformations after 1989. Overall class inequalities in Hungary are smaller than in many other countries in the European Union (using the GINI index as a measure), and they started to rise well before

1989, a trend that continued into the 1990s. In the 20 years between the early 1980s and 2000, the difference between the income of the highest and lowest decile of the population has doubled. The Gini coefficient for Hungary was 0.32 in 2003.

Poverty also emerged on a scale not seen in the decades of state socialism. Absolute poverty (when people do not have their basic needs met) is below 4%, but poverty rate calculated using international measures (such as 50% of per capita income), is around 10%. While single mothers are at an especially high risk of poverty in Hungary, the majority of the poor live in large families with a relatively high number of children. Almost 80% of families with three or more children received some means tested social benefit. In these families, there is usually one wage earner, but his salary is usually insufficient to life the family out of poverty (Fodor 2002, Medgyesi et al 2000).

Aside from class differences, ethnic inequalities also emerged on a scale unimaginable under state socialism. Until 1989 state policy intended to assimilate Hungary's impoverished Roma minority. This strategy achieved some limited success: educational attainment and labour force participation increased. However, a significant section of the Roma population lived in segregated rural areas, and gained skills that became useless after the collapse of the heavy industry in Hungary. As a result, many Roma lost their jobs and are unlikely to be able to find any employment due to their geographical segregation, extreme levels of open discrimination, as well as a lack of skills and training. Poverty rate among the Roma in a survey conducted by Ivan Szelenyi in 2000 was almost 25%, three times higher than in the general population. While a number of projects are trying to address the issue of increasing educational and geographical segregation and discrimination, very little has been achieved over the past decade. There is some variation in the well-being of Roma communities, some do better than others, yet most Roma in Hungary face high levels of discrimination both open and latent, both individual and institutionalized.

3. Policies

Employment policies

Hungarian employment policy is guided – at least in principle – by EU directives and objectives, which are not altogether different from earlier Hungarian tendencies. Hungary has prepared its first National Employment Strategy in 2004, which accepts the basic EU principles of full employment, decent work and social inclusion. The primary objective for employment policy for Hungary, also endorsed by the European Commission, is to increase employment, along with the flexibility of the labour force. As shown above, Hungary's employment rate is well below the EU average, and rates for women and older workers are especially low. Part time work and non-standard options are barely available.

The Hungarian government has made some weak efforts to realize the above noble goals. For example, in 2005 the Parliament passed legislation that made part-time work more affordable for employers (without cutting the social security benefits to the workers themselves), and made special provisions for part-time arrangements for older workers. A few new active labour market policies, encouraging entrepreneurship and training for those returning to work after maternity leave have been introduced, along with tax measures intended to reduce the size of the informal economy. However, none of these measures have achieved a tangible increase in labour force participation over the past two years, and given the economic crisis Hungary has found itself in late 2006, employment and real wages are unlikely to grow in the next few years.

Trade Unions

Trade Unions are weak in Hungary, partly because they are divided along political party lines and are often unable to act jointly (Toth 1995). Another reason for their lack of political and social weight is the fact that trade unions lost their legitimacy as representatives of workers' rights during the state socialist era and have not managed to regain this ever since. This, added to an overall decline in unionization in the world, make Hungarian trade unions insignificant political actors. Less than 17% of workers are members of trade unions, slightly more women than men, which is due to the type of industries men and women tend to work in (table 20).

In 1990, after the first democratic elections the Érdekegyeztető Tanács (Interest Reconciliation Council, ÉT) was established- this is the major tripartite body of Hungary. This forum has gained strength over the years, and expanded in institutional setup. It has contributed to the resolution of a number of political crises, the first already in 1990, caused by a mass scale demonstration of taxi drivers. The new Labour Code of 1992 obliged the government to consult with the ET whenever they are about to send legislation concerning labour issues to parliament and the ET has become the forum where social dialogue about proposed legislation became possible. The ET sets the minimum wages and recommends yearly wage increases (Toth and Nacsá 2004).

Housing situation

A large fraction of formerly state owned apartments have been privatized in Hungary after 1989 and construction began on a large scale, as well. This was partly due to the introduction of mortgages (and especially subsidized mortgages) to finance buying apartments, which had not been available. As a result, there has been a small increase in the quality of dwellings Hungarians occupy (tables 21, 22). Specifically, in the past five years, the per capita room size has increased, people have a little more space than they used to. In 2003, the average floor area per person rose to 30 square meters, up from 28 only four years previously. Perhaps more importantly, the proportion of dwellings without any amenities has declined significantly over the past five years.

Parental leave policies, child care, care for elderly people

Hungary has generous parental leave policies; some would argue that they are generous to the point where they act as a detriment for women's labour force participation. New mothers who have been working for pay before the birth of their child are entitled to 6 months birthing leave and receive 70% of their full salary. After this period, they (or the child's father) are entitled to parental leave (GYED) up to age 2 of the child, during which they receive 70% of their salary but no more than 70% of twice the minimum wage, which is 87,500 HUF or about 325 Euros.

Between age 2-3 of the child or if a parent did not work for pay for 180 days in the two years prior to the birth of the child, either parent is entitled to *parental allowance (GYES)*, which is a leave paid at the level of the minimum pension, which is slightly under 100 Euros a month. Yet another type of parental leave (GYET) may be utilized by women who have at least three children until the youngest is under 8 years of age.

Either parent can take the leaves, and the third and fourth types of leave may be taken by grandparents as well. The leave period counts towards retirement and parents are allowed to work part or full time if they like, although very few of them do, mostly because of the dearth of nursery school places and the unavailability of part time work (Gabos, 2000).

Most young mothers take the leave and many do so for the full three-year period or even longer. As a result, about 10% of employed women are on parental leave at each point in time. It is noteworthy that this number has increased simultaneously with a decline in the birth rate. This indicates that women use this leave as a way to avoid unemployment. Table 24 supports this point: while formally jobs are guaranteed during the parental leave period, only about 55% of parents on leave feel confident that they will get their jobs back. In a recent survey about 10% of women claimed that their workplace ceased to exist, and a similar number do not want to return. About a third of employers do not want to rehire the young parent.

It is primarily women who take the leave, men seldom do. Although their numbers are increasing (table 23), less than 1% of those on parental leave are men. There are further differences in the utilization of the leave: better educated, middle-class and professional women tend to take the shorter, better paid leave, which, in fact, was designed to increase the birth rate within this group in the mid 1980s and to relieve demographers and politicians of their anxiety which resulted from the growing discrepancy between the birth rate among the Roma and the non-Roma population. This multi-tier character of the Hungarian

parental leave system has been in place since the mid-1980s, and has served the purpose of social differentiation, along the lines of both class and ethnicity.

Because women tend to choose to stay out of the labour force until their child is 3 years old, very few nursery school places are available. It is unclear what the cause and the effect is in this context: even if women do want to go back to work, high quality nursery schools are hard to find, especially outside the largest cities. Less than 10% of children between ages 1-3 are in nursery school in Hungary, far from the Lisbon targets. In Hungary, currently, it is ideologically almost unacceptable for most Hungarian parents to send children under 3 years to public day care: psychologists and fellow mothers extol the virtue in the public media of family based care for small children. It is difficult to go against cultural norms, even for young professional women who could afford private care for their children and who may lose the most when giving up their jobs. Kindergarten, however, is more popular: over 80% of Hungarian children between 3-6 years old are in day care.

As a result, women often drop out of the labour force for three to even six or more years. In the meantime, very few participate in trainings, or work part time – again, this is due to the unavailability of care, as well as public sentiments about the needs of small children, inherited from the state socialist era. At the end of their leave women often find it difficult to return: their workplace disappeared and they themselves may have lost significant job skills. While a handful of recent training projects have been introduced to help women return to work after childbearing, these are clearly insufficient.

In addition, the lengthy maternity leave means that all women of child bearing age pose a potential risk for employers, who are reluctant to hire an employee who is likely to disappear in the near future for such a long period of time. While it is illegal to ask questions about marital or family status, and even family plans at job interviews, employers do it anyway, and hire women after they make an assessment of the possible risk they pose.

The lengthy parental leave options obviously hinder women's labour force participation and making it difficult for those in the workforce to gain high quality positions. On the other hand, they serve as unemployment and poverty relief for women living in impoverished areas, where they have no chance of getting employment anyway: at least they are getting paid for their work of raising children, however meager these benefits may be. For this reason, and because of the widely shared conviction that it is best for children under three to stay at home with mom, no government has dared to consider reforming these measures.

Hungary has some provisions for those who care for permanently disabled, or sick close relatives at home. Those people over 18, who are caring for such persons, may take unpaid leave from their workplaces, and will receive a state subsidy in the amount of the minimum pension, which is 25,800 HUF in 2006, or roughly 95 Euros. Those who provide special care for people who have special needs may receive 30% more. Mostly women take this kind of leave and receive the subsidy.

4. Conclusion

As I am writing this, vast political demonstrations have been taking place in Budapest for a week: tens of thousands of people are demanding that the government resign. The crowd's anger is sustained by the new austerity measures introduced after the election victory of the Socialist party in 2006. The new measures were designed to achieve financial stability and reduce Hungary's vast budget deficit, a clearly stated requirement from the European Union. The measures include reducing public sector jobs, a significant raise in the prices of gas and electricity, an increase in taxes paid by small entrepreneurs, the introduction of tuition fee at universities and co-payments for doctor's visit and hospital care – just to name the most contested ones. Most people are expected to suffer a reduction in their quality of life and employment.

Economists – both within Hungary and those paid by international economic and political agencies – and politicians seem to agree that these measures are absolutely necessary in order to sustain Hungary's economic development in the long run. A significant segment of the population, having to face the challenges of a global capitalist economy, seem to think otherwise, although aside from the ultranationalist agenda, no real alternatives have emerged. How Hungarians' quality of life will change in the future will depend on the compromise soon to be made between neo-liberal policy-makers and the population who seems to be expressing its distaste for the government in more and more explicit ways.

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Appendix

Year	Live births	Live births per 1,000 women aged 15-49	Total fertility rate
1980	148 673	57.6	1.92
1990	125 679	49.4	1.84
2001	97 047	38.1	1.31
2005	97 496	39.8	1.32

Table 1. Live births and fertility rates. (Source: HCSO, Vital Events, 2005, p. 7)

Year	Marriage	Divorce	Live birth	Death
1980	7.5	2.6	13.9	13.6
1990	6.4	2.4	12.1	14.0
2001	4.3	2.4	9.5	13.0
2005	4.4	2.5	9.7	13.5

Table 2. Marriage, divorce, live birth and death rates per 1,000 persons. (Source: HCSO, Vital Events, 2005, p. 9)

Year	Women	Men
1970	21.6	24.5
1980	21.8	24.5
1985	21.8	24.8
1990	22.0	24.7
1995	22.7	25.2
2000	24.7	27.2
2002	25.7	28.2
2004	26.5	29.0

Table 3. Average age at first marriage (Source: HCSO, MYFSAEO, Nők és férfiak Magyarországon, 2004, p. 11.)

Year	Men	Women	Difference
1900-1901	36.6	38.2	1.6
1949	59.3	63.4	4.1
1960	65.9	70.1	4.2
1970	66.3	72.1	5.8
1980	65.5	72.7	7.2
1990	65.1	73.7	8.6
2000	67.1	75.6	8.5

Table 4. Life expectancy at birth - changes over time for men and women. (Source: HCSO, MFSÁ, Nők és férfiak Magyarországon, 2001, p. 7)

Year	Total	Men	Women
1993	62.3	69.9	54.9
1995	58.9	67.9	50.3
2000	59.9	67.5	52.6
2005	61.4	67.9	55.1

Table 5. Activity rates of population aged 15-64. (Source: HCSO, Labour Force Survey 2005, pp. 18-20; Nők és férfiak Magyarországon, 2001, pp. 71-72)

Year	Men	Women
1996	60	55
1997	60	56
2001	61	57
2004	62	58

Table 6. average age at retirement for men and women - changes over time. (Source: Varga, Júlia, 2005.)

Age group	Total	Men	Women
15-19	5.3	6.5	4.1
20-24	47.5	52.8	42.1
25-29	77.4	88.2	66.2
30-34	79.4	92.7	66.0
35-39	82.9	90.5	75.2
40-44	83.0	87.2	79.1
45-49	79.7	81.0	78.4
50-54	71.9	73.6	70.4
55-59	50.8	59.6	43.4
60-64	14.9	21.2	9.9

Table 7. Activity rates by age group for different age groups in 2005 (Source: HCSO, Labour Force Survey, Quarter I, 2006, p. 44.)

Year	Total	Men	Women
1993	54.8	60.6	49.3
1995	52.9	60.2	45.9
2000	49.6	56.8	43.0
2005	50.5	57.4	44.2

Table 8. Employment rates of population aged 15-64. (Source: Source: HCSO, Labour Force Survey 2005, pp. 18-20; Nők és férfiak Magyarországon, 2001, pp. 71-72)

Year	Total	Men	Women
1993	11.9	13.3	10.3
1995	10.2	11.4	8.7
2000	6.4	7.0	5.6
2005	7.2	7.0	7.5

Table 9. Unemployment rates of population aged 15-64. (Source: HCSO, Labour Force Survey 2005, pp. 18-20; Nők és férfiak Magyarországon, 2001, pp. 71-72)

	Year	Total	Men	Women
Aged 15-24	1998	14.0	15.8	11.6
	2000	12.7	13.8	11.2
	2004	15.5	16.2	14.4
Aged 15-29	1998	11.4	12.3	10.2
	2000	9.9	10.5	9.1
	2004	9.7	9.6	9.8

Table 10. Youth unemployment rate (Source: HCSO, *Youth on the Labour Market, 2004*, pp. 31-35)

Industry	Women	Women	Men	Men
	1992	2003	1992	2003
Agriculture, hunting, forest management, fishing	7.7	2.7	14.7	7.8
Mining	0.4	0.1	2.1	0.5
Processing industry	24.8	21.1	27.3	25.7
Supply of electricity, gas, steam and water	1.7	1.0	3.5	2.4
Construction industry	1.7	1.4	8.5	12.9
Trade, repair	15.0	15.9	9.3	12.6
Accommodation, catering	3.6	4.4	2.3	2.8
Shipping, warehousing, postal services, telecommunications	5.5	4.7	11.2	10.3
Financial services	2.8	2.8	0.8	1.1
Property transactions, economic services	3.9	6.8	3.2	6.8
Public administration, defence; mandatory social security	5.5	8.0	6.2	7.1
Education	12.7	14.3	3.5	3.4
Health and social care	9.5	11.4	2.7	2.9
Other community and personal services	5.2	5.4	4.7	3.7

Table 11. Distribution of employed persons by industries and sex in 1992 and 2003 (%). (Source: Bukodi, 2006, p. 24)

Occupational classes	Women				Men			
	1983	1992	1999	2002	1983	1992	1999	2002
Higher-level manager, senior professional, official	5.3	5.4	9.0	9.2	9.7	10.4	11.2	11.6
Lower-level manager, lower-level professional, official	16.2	23.0	24.5	26.8	8.8	10.4	11.9	11.5
Non-manual routine	19.0	19.2	16.6	14.2	2.4	1.8	2.3	2.6
Routine - services	6.7	8.3	11.6	12.1	1.8	2.7	3.8	3.9
Non-agricultural entrepreneur	1.5	3.7	6.6	5.4	2.3	6.4	11.7	10.3
Agricultural entrepreneur	0.2	0.5	0.8	0.7	1.2	1.6	2.7	2.1
Skilled manual	12.1	12.4	11.3	9.9	37.5	36.6	31.8	31.9
Unskilled manual	29.3	23.1	18.0	21.0	27.3	23.4	20.6	22.7
Agricultural worker	9.7	4.4	1.6	0.9	9.0	6.7	4.0	3.4

Table 12. Distribution of employed persons by occupational classes and sex, 1983-2002 (%). (Source: Bukodi, 2006, p. 25)

Year	Gross income (average income of full-time employees)	Real wages index
1995	116.8	87.8
1996	120.4	95.0
1997	122.3	104.9
1998	118.3	103.6
1999	116.1	102.5
2000	113.5	101.5
2001	118.0	106.4
2002	118.3	113.6
2003	112.0	109.2
2004	106.1	99.0

Table 13. Change in gross and real wages, as % of previous year, 1995-2004. (Source: HCSO, Summary Data of the 2005 Income of the Population Sample, p. 7.) Previous year = 100

Women's gross earnings as % of men's gross earnings in the whole economy	90.4
Women's gross earnings as % of men's gross earnings in the state sector	80.4
Women's gross earnings as % of men's gross earnings in the private sector	85.1

Table 14. Proportion of gross earnings by women and men (Source: Munkaerőpiaci Tükör 2005, pp. 310-311.)

Educational attainment	Women's gross earnings as % of men's gross earnings
Primary school 1-7th year	94.6
Completed primary school (8 years)	88.6
Trade school	100.3
Vocational school	79.8
Vocational high school	91.5
Technical school	80.1
Secondary grammar school	91.8
Bachelor's degree	74.2
Master's degree	81.0
Total	90.4

Table 15. Proportion of gross earnings by women and men by qualification (Source: Munkaerőpiaci Tükör 2005, pp. 310-311.)

	Total	Men	Women
% of persons working overtime	5.5	6.4	4.5
Number of overtime hours per week per person	10.1	10.6	9.2
Of which: non-paid overtime hours per week per person	2.6	2.2	3.2

Table 16. Working overtime by sex, 2004 (Source: HCSO, Working Time Arrangement Organization 2005, p. 35)

	Total	Men	Women
Total number of persons working part time	128 111	40 355	87 756
Persons working part time, as % of all employed persons	4.2	2.6	6.0

Table 17. Persons working part time, 2004 (Source: HCSO, Working Time Arrangement Organization 2005, p. 36)

	Total	Men	Women
Number of persons working in flexitime	76 855	52 575	24 280
% of persons working in flexitime	100,0	68.4	31.6
Persons working in flexitime, as % of all employed persons	2.5	3.4	1.7

Table 18. Persons working in fixed and flexible working time, 2004 (Source: HCSO, Working Time Arrangement Organization 2005, p. 33)

Possibility	Has possibility to flexibly change the beginning or end of work time due to family reasons			Has possibility to stay away from work for a whole day due to family reasons		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Usually has possibility	37.7	36.5	37.2	33.2	30.3	31.9
Rarely has possibility	24.3	28.9	26.4	24.9	28.4	26.5
Has no possibility	38.0	34.6	36.4	41.9	41.3	41.6

Table 19. Employed aged 15–64 according to possibility to vary start or/and end of working day, or to organise working time in order to take days off for family reasons by sex, 2005. (Source: HCSO Reconciliation between Work and Family Life 2005, p. 14)

Total	Men	Women
16.9	15.3	18.7

Table 20. Trade Union members, as % of all workers, 2004, (Source: HCSO Reconciliation between Work and Family Life 2005, p. 45)

Year	Population per 100 dwellings	Population per 100 rooms	Average floor area per person, sqm
1999	261	104	28
2003	260	98	30

Table 21. Population per dwellings and rooms; average floor area of occupied dwellings (Source: HCSO, 2005, Housing Conditions at the Turn of the Century, p. 13)

Type of dwelling	Share of dwellings	
	1999	2003
Dwellings without basic amenities	18.9	10.9
Without water supply	8.1	7.3
Without sewerage	47.7	35.1
Without bathroom	11.9	7.8
Without toilet	11.7	9.0
Built before 1945	27.5	23.0

Table 22. Quality of dwellings, as % of total housing stock (Source: HCSO, 2005, Housing Conditions at the Turn of the Century, p. 23).

Year	Men	Women	Proportion of women of employment age
1990	cc. 1,000-3,000	244,700	8.6
1995	5,000	280,000	9.5
2001	cc. 1,000-3,000	296,500	9.7
2005	11,000	293,300	9.3

Table 23. Number of people on childcare leave. (Source: HCSO, 2006, Return to the Labour Market after Childbearing, p. 6)

	1995	1999	2005
Workplace ceased to operate	9.2	10.0	10.4
Workplace exists but employer does not wish to re-employ the parent	29.8	32.4	26.2
Employer wishes to re-employ her but she does not wish to return to the same workplace	8.7	11.2	8.1
Employer wishes to re-employ the parent and she wishes to return	52.3	46.4	55.3

Table 24. Rates of previously employed childcare beneficiaries in terms of opportunities of returning to the labour market after childcare leave (%) (Source: HCSO, 2006, Return to the Labour Market after Childbearing, p. 8)