

LABOUR MARKET PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN LIVING IN THE NORTH GREAT PLAIN REGION OF HUNGARY

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Abstract

This paper analyses the labour market participation of women living in the Northern Great Plain region in Hungary, in the context of global and Hungarian employment trends. The article focuses on the attitude of women living in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county, which has the worst economic performance in the region.

In Hungary, the negative impacts of the 2008 financial crisis started to diminish in 2013, as a result current Hungarian employment rate is only slightly behind the EU average. Hungary is characterized by a large regional disparity in terms of employment and unemployment. Within the North-Great Plain region, the indicators of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county are the worst. The unemployment rate is more than twice as high as the national average, the employment rate is 6.5 percentage points lower than the average. At both national and regional level the employment rate of women is far below the employment rate of men.

Keywords: employment, labour market, regional differences, women

Introduction

The employment situation is getting increasingly better in Hungary. The positive changes began in 2013 when the country started to get over the economic and employment shock of the 2008 financial crisis. However, in spite of the positive trend, the level of employment (KSH, 2016) and labour market mobility (Sebők, 2015) are different in Hungary's various regions and counties, and the gap between the employment rate of women and men is constant. This paper focuses on the people living in the North Great Plain region, which is disadvantaged in terms of labour market. Besides mapping women's labour market engagement, I will also discuss correlations with international employment situation. The newly implemented measures to promote employment in the Hungarian family support system will also be mentioned as women's employment opportunities and the willingness to have children are in close connection. Finally, the results of my research conducted in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county will be introduced. The research focused on women raising young children. The article refers to the available literature, previous research materials, as well as the relevant databases of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH) and Eurostat.

The role of work in the lives of individuals and families

Work plays a central role in people's life. The most important factor is safety, which includes all the factors listed below. Work means safety, first of all, because the

income from work ensures the basic conditions of living. Those, who do not have work, however, have to face the lack of several work-related services and benefits (social security).

Unemployment can affect subjective well-being and physical health. According to an international study, the risk of deteriorating health is 28% higher for an unemployed person. The risk of health deterioration affects various age groups in a different way; it is lower for elderly people, but much higher in the case of young people. (Cooper et al., 2008) In my opinion, there is a significant relationship between socio-economic status, health status and mortality rate.

The work-related income and the social environment provided by the workplace also contribute to the individual's willingness to participate in those activities that are common for most members of society.

The lack of the parents' income, even if in an indirect way, has an impact on the future performance of the child at school. According to Coleman (1996), one of the three components of the family background is the financial capital that includes the income and wealth of the family. Providing resources for purchasing devices and different services helps children achieve better school performance. If the financial capital is insufficient, it may have a negative effect on the child's performance at school. There is no doubt that unemployment causes difficulties for people and families in many areas of life.

Dual role as a protection factor?

According to sociological research on women's way of life and women's roles, the role of women in society is highly complex. The spread of the dual-breadwinner family model resulted in the emergence of the so-called "dual role", which refers to women's family (maternal) and the labour market roles (Spéder, 2001).

Dual role is also called *dual burden* in literature. It suggests that, in addition to the employment of large numbers of women, the amount of their unpaid household work and the time they spend on it has remained the same. To fulfil the expectations of the dual role can be difficult. It might as well be the source of conflicts within the family. However, according to Crosby (1991) being actively present on the labour market and in the family at the same time has a positive impact on the self-esteem of working mothers. In this case, the positive effect of the dual role on the individual can be enhanced and it can develop further if one of the roles becomes dominant. In the case of a temporary weakening of one role, tasks from the other can help to avoid the feeling of being useless. Nguyen (2005) states that the released energy returns when it is invested in another area of life (not in a financial sense). For example, when the role of the woman having a child weakens in the labour market, she will begin to concentrate on the family and the household. (Nguyen, 2005)

Thus, multipurpose engagement including paid work and unpaid work (household chores, child rearing) is basically a difficulty but at the same time it can also be a protective factor. This explains why the psychological burden of being unemployed affects men more than women. "In the case of unemployed women household and child rearing become the primary scene of life, time management and everyday life"

(Bánfalvy, 2002: 100). Women's unemployment-related lower psychological burden is due to their better self-esteem.

In addition, women tend to lose self-confidence less often, they appreciate usual activities more, they can face problems more often and are generally more satisfied than men. Cooper et al. (2008) also found that the adverse effects of unemployment have a greater impact on men than on women. The risk of getting sick is four times higher for men affected by long-term (over one year) unemployment than for employed men. In the case of women, this difference is only 1.7.

In addition to research studies focusing on women's dual role, other studies point out the difficulties men have to face in this issue. They argue that men take more tasks, especially in relation with child rearing, from their partners. The same thing cannot be said about housework. According to Voltz (2007), however, the involvement of men in housework is often hindered by women, who try to defend their private sphere. Spéder (2011) adds that income-related gender differences can clearly hinder the quitting of the traditional form of sharing roles (Spéder, 2011).

Standing (2011) in his book titled "*The Precariat*" highlights that women's labour market insecurity is getting more serious as a result of the contemporary demographic challenge, namely aging society. Standing points out that the dual shift has now developed to triple shift, which imposes additional burdens on women in society. The first of the triple shift includes the tasks associated with the employee's role. The second shift is related to household activities. The third one is taking care of parents.

The theoretical background of women's work patterns

A number of factors influence success and lack of success on labour market. This may include, for example the level of education, the type of the profession and the sector it belongs to as well as the experience previously gained on the labour market. Recent forecasts of status attainment studies (Altorjai and Róbert, 2006) predict the decisive effect of education level when labour market opportunities are limited. Until 2000, the activity rate of graduates was higher than that of the lower educated groups (Scharle, 2008), however, there is no doubt that the unemployment rate among highly educated people is still lower (KSH 2016). Women's employment rate is below the employment of men, but this gap is narrower in the case of more educated men and women. (KSH 2016).

In addition, a number of individual qualities, such as adaptability, learning, acceptance of the organizational hierarchy influence success in the labour market. In the case of high-status professions, the rate of female employees is surprisingly high, which can be explained by the higher proportion of women in higher education, in addition to the previously mentioned factors. (Fónai, 2014, 2016) However, it should also be noted that at certain age or in certain family conditions unstable labour market situation is more typical and getting into the labour market is more difficult. Limited access to labour market due to childbirth can be mentioned here, which evidently mainly affects women. The disadvantageous situation of women in the labour market is not a recent phenomenon, and it affects not only Hungary. Within the European Union there is a 8-9% gap between the employment rate of men and women, although Hungarian labour force is characterized by even more

serious differences. Despite the fact that the employment rate has been continuously growing for at least three years, gender disadvantage remained on the same level in 2016. The employment of women is still 13% lower than the employment of men, which is primarily due to the low activity rate of women raising young children.

It is important to increase women's labour market participation for various reasons. Aging is a typical problem of Hungarian and European societies, so it would be desirable to coordinate work and private life for the increase of the economy and the sustainability of the pension system (Plantenga and Remery, 2005). In connection with the increasing social reproduction and the willingness to have children, it is also crucial to improve the employment situation of women. Hungarian research studies have found a significant connection between the decline in the number of children and labour market difficulties. Spéder's (2001) large-sampled, representative, longitudinal study revealed that among the members of the children- and family-centric Hungarian society those, who are in reproductive age would like to have more than two children. However, there is a difference of one child between their plan and the number of children they actually have. It means that, the willingness to have more children is an existing preference, but some obstacles hinder its realization. According to Spéder (2001) having more children has labour market obstacles. The research also revealed that only 29% of the respondents were able to realize what they considered to be ideal. (Spéder, 2001, 2006)

International and national comparative studies emphasize the importance of the employment support systems of countries in creating gender equality. One of the major conclusions of the investigations is that these tools affect not only women's participation in the labour market, but also their performance, but perhaps not in the same extent. While there is no doubt that the means of the employment policy influencing women's work have a positive impact on women's access to paid employment, but at the same time they also maintain their disadvantages. Part-time employment provides opportunities for work but it also contributes to gender segregation. Reduced-time employment determines the extent and nature of work, thus deprives women of a more reasonable wage and higher income. (Bardasi and Gornick, 2008; Stier and Yaish, 2008) In order to achieve women's equal opportunities in the labour market, measures to reduce incompatibility of paid work and housework are becoming increasingly important. According to Stier and Yaish (2008), these measures work as a "double-edged sword" in terms of women's equal opportunities in the labour market. According to them researchers dealing with the subject represent two different approaches. Some of them (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Stier and Yaish, 2008) argue that these measures definitely have a positive impact on women's participation in the labour market as well as family responsibilities and their combination. The others (Bardasi and Gornick, 2008) think that they contribute to the preservation of women's disadvantage in the labour market. These measures relate women to jobs that offer unfavourable payment and limited opportunities of promotion, which reinforce the employers' discrimination and hinders women's access to jobs offering better career advancement and it keeps up the employment gap between men and women.

Occupational activity has different significance for men and women. The majority of women emphasize the priority of the family and all their other activities are less important. Having this attitude depends on which social group they belong to.

According to Nagy (1997) "even the career-centered, Hungarian female economic managers who carefully build their career, do not hesitate when they have to choose between childbirth or to build a professional career." This is also supported by the fact that the percentage of Hungarian women who live without children voluntarily is 6%. (Spéder, 2015) However, it can be considered as a general trend that the majority of young people do not have more than one child and they usually interrupt their employment for a very short time. This is also confirmed by the findings of the study I carried out in a county in Hungary: 87% of the participants thinks that women raising young children have to stay at home for three years after childbirth, yet 56 % of them return to the labour market earlier.

Women's higher education level and occupational status have a positive impact on their return to the labour market. A very high proportion of female leaders and intellectuals return to work during the first three years of the maternity leave as compared to lower ranked intellectuals and unskilled female employees (Bukodi and Róbert, 1999). Women of a more favourable social position tend to preserve the continuity of their career, as the interruption means "opportunity cost". The occupational and professional ambitions of women who invest more in knowledge can be hampered by the prolongation of the time they spent at home, as this period destroys " the human capital that is mostly related to the occupational career (special qualifications, knowledge, relationships)" (Bukodi and Róbert, 1999: 222)

Labour market success often occurs at the expense of family balance. The dual burden of women can be mentioned as a major obstacle to women's labour market career. Dual burden means the role of a housewife and raising of children in addition to working (Nagy, 1997). People's career motivation is varied and it depends on several factors at the same time, including different demographic factors (age, gender, marital status, number of the dependents), education, the position in the labour market hierarchy, accumulated work experience.

Women's career choices are primarily influenced by emotions and values, men are more likely to choose a career on the basis of interests (Koncz, 2005). It is confirmed by Fényes (2010), who intended to find out the motivation of the choice of students in tertiary education. "Emotional determination is an advantage in family, friendly relationships, but it is a disadvantage in workplaces and in the labour market. According to surveys, many people do not like to work with female managers because they feel they are driven by their emotions "(Koncz, 2005: 69).

'What are the problems that segregation causes?' asks Frey (2009). On one hand, gender segregation hampers the normal functioning of the labour market. On the other hand it disrupts the equilibrium of the labour market and leads to further inequalities.

International situation

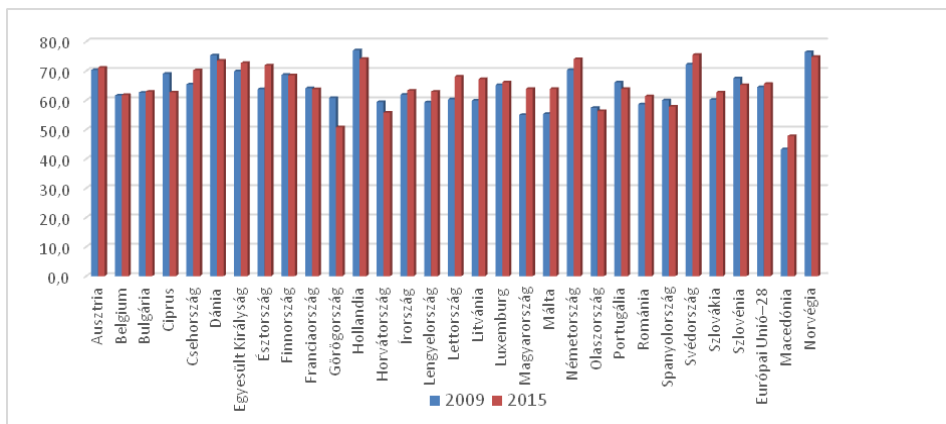
Before the political change of 1989-1990, the employment rate of the Hungarian women exceeded the average of the EU Member States. However, the change of regime brought forth dramatic processes in the labour market. As a result of the political and economic changes at the beginning of the 1990s, the proportion of the employed men and women decreased dramatically which resulted in a steady

increase of the number of inactive persons. Consequently, at the beginning of the 1990s the employment in Hungary dropped to three-quarters of the previous years.

This unfavourable employment situation remained continuously until 2014. From 2000 to 2013, the difference between the Hungarian employment rate and the EU average was between 6% and 10%. (KSH 2016). Women's low employment rate is responsible for a significant part of the lag, which almost reached 9% in 2008. Starting from 2003 the difference between the employment of women and men decreased to 3% and one year later to 1.7%. In 2016, the employment rate of the Hungarian women was only 1.2% behind the EU average. Thus, the change in the Hungarian employment situation has significantly improved the position of the country in the international context. The latest (2015) data show a 9% increase compared to the 55% percentage in 2009. This performance is not only to be recognized only in the EU, but also at Eastern European level.

Chart 1

Employment rate in the European Union, 2009, 2015



Source: <http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/setupDownloads.do>, own edition

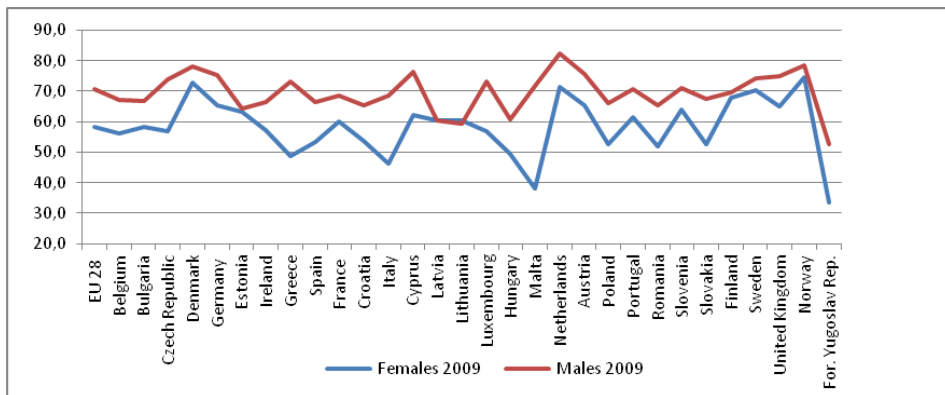
The chart above illustrates Hungary's increasingly favourable employment situation, which was almost 64% in 2015. However, in several other countries, such as Germany (74.0%), Norway (74.5%), Denmark (73.5%), Sweden (75.5%) the employment rate was almost 75% in the same year. The data of the “Visegrád Four” member states (Cooperation of four Central European countries: Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia and Hungary) are the best in the Czech Republic (70.2%), while Poland (62.9%) and Slovakia (62.7%) slightly lag behind Hungary. However, since the worst period between 2009 and 2015, the greatest improvement in the percentage of employed persons took place in Hungary (8.9%) and Malta (8.6%).

Latvia is the third with 7.8% increase. In Greece (-10%), Cyprus (-6.3%), the Netherlands (-2.9%), Croatia (-3.6%), Portugal (-2.2%), Spain (-2, 2%), Slovenia (-2.3%), though, the change was negative. Hungary is in a more favourable situation when comparing the number of employees to the active age population. In this relation, Hungary has an employment rate of over 70%. (KSH 216, Eurostat 2016)

The Hungarian increase can be explained by the combined effect of several factors. Scharle (2016) mentions three main reasons. In his view, the improvement of the education of the Hungarian population, the policy measures and the improving general economic situation have changed the employment indicators.

Chart 2

*Employment rate of the 15-64 year old population by gender in 2009
(percentage of the total population)*



Source: own edition <http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do>,

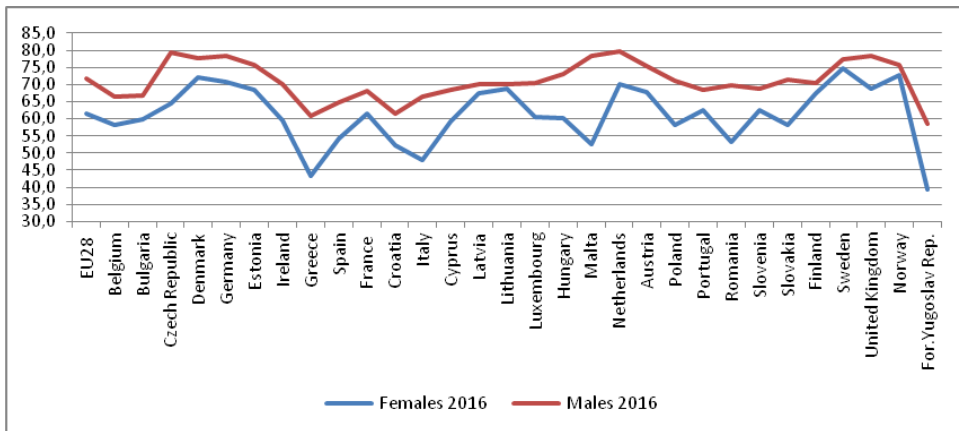
The difference in the employment of women and men can be considered as a European phenomenon. In the European Union, in 2016 there was a 10.5% difference in the gender distribution of employment. This was 1.7% less than it had been in the 2009 economic crisis. In certain countries, though, the employment level of men and women was almost the same (Figure 2). The difference was 3% or less in Norway, Finland, Sweden, Lithuania, Latvia. The most striking differences were in Malta (25.6%), the Former Yugoslav Republic (19.4%), Italy (18.4%), Greece (17.7%) Romania (16.4%), the Czech Republic (14.9%), Slovakia (13.1%), Poland (12.9%), and in Hungary (12.8%). (Chart 3)

This large difference is even more interesting because, although the numbers vary, depending on the country, the average of the change in women's percentage was higher (3%) than that of men (1.3%). This refers to the improving labour market situation of women, which is also confirmed by the fact that the employment difficulties emerging from the financial crisis primarily affects men. Massive gender differences exceeding the EU average can be seen in the countries of Visegrád Four, however, the position of Hungary is relatively the best among them. (Chart 3)

Based on these facts of the international situation, it can be stated that the post-crisis employment boom affected women in a higher proportion in average yet their lag from men was still significant even in 2016.

Chart 3

*Employment rate of the 15-64 year old population by gender, in 2016
(percentage of the total population)*



Source: <http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do>, own edition

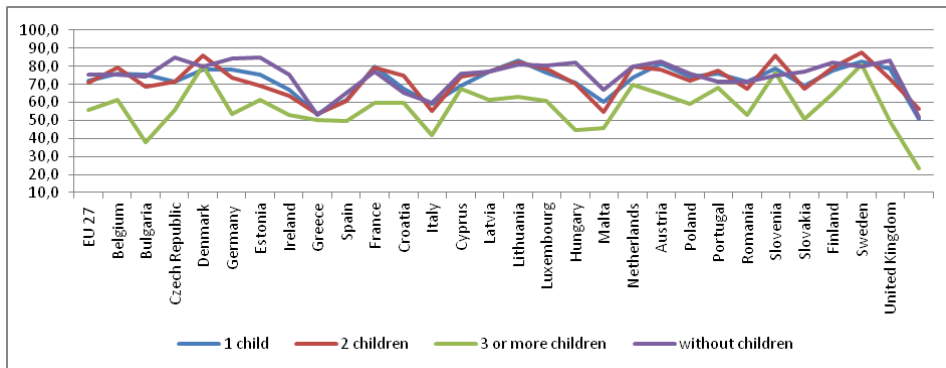
The lower employment rate of women is related to their gender roles. From the beginning of a certain stage of life, priorities related to the labour market and private life are transformed. Focusing on their family-related roles means a disadvantage concerning their role in the labour market. And this disadvantage increases proportionally with the number of children.

Chart 4 contains the employment rate of mothers based on the number of children. The data clearly shows that in nearly all member states the percentage in the employment of women without children is better than the percentage of women raising children. In addition, there is no significant difference between the percentage in the employment of women with one and two children. The number of children a woman has clearly changes her position in the labour market. This is the most significant in the case of women with three or more children. The percentage of women's employment is the lowest in Malta (45.9%), similarly low as in Hungary (44.9%). Compared to most member states where the percentage is the most favourable (Denmark with 80.5% and the Slovenia with 76.5%) and the average of the EU27 (55.8%), the low percentage of Hungary is striking. It should be noted that in Slovenia parents on childcare leave are regarded as employed. So, all things considered, having more than two, three year old or even younger children has obviously a negative impact on the employment rate of women.

Chart 4 confirms the labour market disadvantage of women with three or more children. In international comparison with other EU Member States the situation of women raising three or more young children is worse only in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and in Bulgaria than in Hungary. In 2014 Hungary was among the countries where the situation was the worst.

Chart 4

Employment rates of 25–54 year old women by number of children in 2014



Source: R. Fedor, Toldi 2016.

Having children vs/and being employed

Low female employment rate and the difficult labour market integration of women raising young children made the policy makers focus on possible solutions. The more and more alarming demographic trends, primarily the decline in the number of children, are closely related to labour market difficulties. Although a strong child- and family-friendly way of thinking can be experienced in the wide range of supports related to long-term child care leave, however, it has become apparent that discontinuity of work for a long period undermines the employment opportunities of mothers.

As a result, since 2014, the Family Support measures promoting employment have been expanded and the new legal environment has broadened the range of beneficiaries. New benefits include student child care allowance, multiple child care benefits, allowances that can be claimed by parents who are raising twins, as well as working while being on Maternity Grant²/ Child Care Allowance³. The two main goals of introducing these measures are to stop the negative demographic trends and to promote the employment of women raising young children.

Thanks to the students' maternity grant women, who have children during their higher education studies or one year after their graduation become eligible for a higher amount of childcare leave. Prior to the implementation of this grant, having children immediately after graduation was not a realistic perspective for young

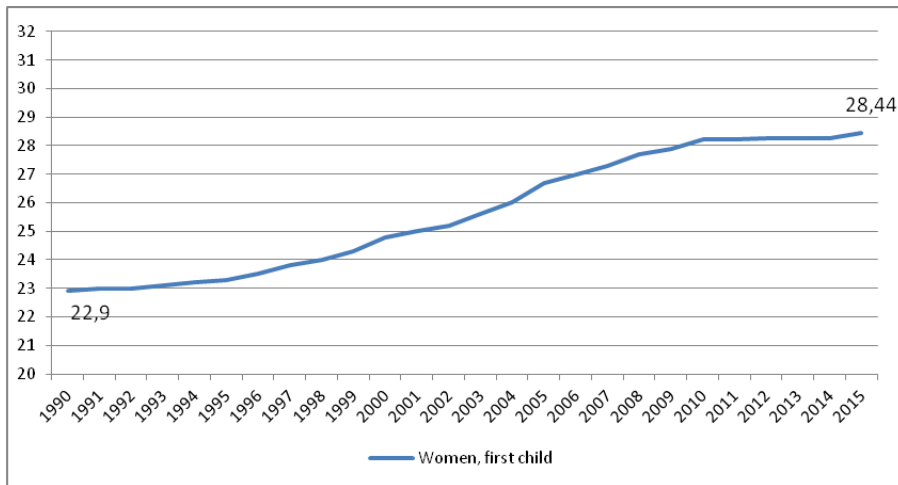
² Maternity grant (GYED): mothers with health insurance are eligible to get this earnings-related monthly allowance. Currently it is available until the child turns two years of age. Its amount is equivalent to the 70% of the daily average earnings.

³ Child benefit/child care allowance (GYES): The father or the mother is eligible to get it until the child turns three years of age. This allowance is not insurance-related, the amount is fixed, independently of the income.

graduates, primarily for financial reasons. Instead of having a child after the graduation they usually spent a few years in the labour market in order to be eligible for a more reasonable support, and most of them had children afterwards. As a consequence, the age of giving birth to the first child prolonged even further, which significantly influenced the number of further children. Currently, Hungarian women are 28.4 years old on average when they deliver their first child. (Chart 5)

Chart 5

The average age of women at the time of their first child, 1990-2015



Source: KSH, 2016. own edition

The underlying reason for the implementation of more allowances that can be claimed after having multiple children and twins is that the household's financial burden grows with the increase in the number of children raised in the family. The loss of income is related to having many children and the absence from the labour market. The aim of implementing additional forms of support is to compensate for the labour market 'opportunity cost' due to having more than one child. As a result, having children is no longer considered to be a labour market and financial risk for the families. The long-term benefit of these measures will hopefully manifest later, in the growth of the number of children. The flexible regulation of working during the time of maternity grant/child care allowance is also to reduce the loss of income, as well as the risk and the uncertainty associated with long-term absence from work. The main improvement in the regulation is the revision of the time limit of paid work during childcare leave. According to this, full time work is now allowed during maternity grant/child care allowance, from the time when the child turns six months old. Earlier only part-time employment was allowed after the child became six months (or later one year) old. The loosening of the restrictions means a significant financial benefit for families. In addition to family support relating to raising children, families can also get income from paid work. In this sense, from 2014, families with children can have double benefits, reducing the financial risk due to childbirth. There is no available data yet on the effects of the benefits as only three years have passed since they were introduced. Even if there is data related to

the use of the newly introduced measures, the actual effects will turn out only in medium or long term. It should be noted that although these benefits contribute less to the balance between family and work, they are likely to reduce the income loss resulting from the conflicts of child-rearing and employment, which is referred to as the main cause of not having multiple children.

The situation in Hungary regarding the quality of employment, the conflict between having children or being employed and the education level of the mothers shows a very strong territorial variation in Hungary. In the next part of this paper one of the most disadvantaged Hungarian regions, namely the North Great Plain region will be introduced according to the dimensions presented above, with the focus on Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County.

Introduction of the North Great Plain Region

The North Great Plain Region is the second largest and most populous region in the country, located in the north-eastern part of the Great Plain. It has more than 300 km long border with three neighboring countries: Slovakia, Ukraine and Romania. (KSH, 2017; Rácz, 2017). The territory of the region is 17729 km², which accounts for nearly 20% of Hungary's territory. Its population is 1.468 million. (KSH, 2017). The region includes Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok, Hajdú-Bihar and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg counties. The Northern Great Plain Region is one of the most disadvantaged Hungarian regions, and this is apparent from the economic activity indicators. While the unemployment rate in Hungary was 4.3% in the first half of 2017, in the region it was higher than 7%. Among the three counties of the region Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg has the worst percentage (8.8%). It is one of the reasons why the data for studying the employment attitudes of women raising young children were taken here. The results of this research will be presented at the end of this paper.

Regional situation in national context

The 2008 financial crisis caused a fatal change in the developed countries. The collapse of the financial market had a direct impact on the labour market. The Hungarian employment indicators were extremely low at the time of the political change after the 2010 elections. The employment rate fell below 55% by 2010. This was 2.5% lower than four years earlier. The unemployment rate grew by nearly 4% over the same period, and by 2010 it grew over 11%. The labour market crisis started to decline from 2013, then the employment rate exceeded 58.1%. In the following period, largely due to the active means of the labour market policies, the trend that began in 2013 developed further and the latest (2016) data show a 66.5% employment rate.

According to Hungarian surveys the favourable trend is due to the public work programs that were implemented for the unemployed. Without them the employment rate would probably be lower. However, one thing is worth mentioning: there are small settlements where the wages provided by public work are the only available source of income, thus, it is vital for families. It is typical to certain settlements in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county. On the other hand, the

amount of income obtained from public work is significantly less than the earnings in the open labour market.

There is a large territorial difference in Hungary in terms of employment and unemployment, similarly to the international tendencies. The most underdeveloped counties are Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, Hajdú-Bihar, Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, and Nógrád, while the most developed ones are Győr-Moson-Sopron, Vas, Fejér and Pest. Regarding the regions, the Northern Great Plain (9.3%), North Hungary (6.3%) and Southern Transdanubia (6.2%) are affected the most by unemployment, while Western and Central regions in Transdanubia (2.6% and 3.0%) have lower percentage of unemployment. In addition, there are considerable differences within each county, which can be attributed to the accessibility due to the lack of adequate infrastructure. (KSH, 2016)

The reduction of territorial disparities is difficult, since the least educated people usually live in the counties where the situation is the worst.

Based on statistical data (Chart 6), the employment indicators in the North Great Plain region are worse than the national average. The difference is 4.5%. On one hand this is due to the geographical location of the region, but on the other hand it can be explained by the fact that Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county is one of the counties of the region that is the most affected by employment difficulties. In 2016, Northern Hungary was the only region with lower employment rate (61.8%), although the difference was only 0.2%.

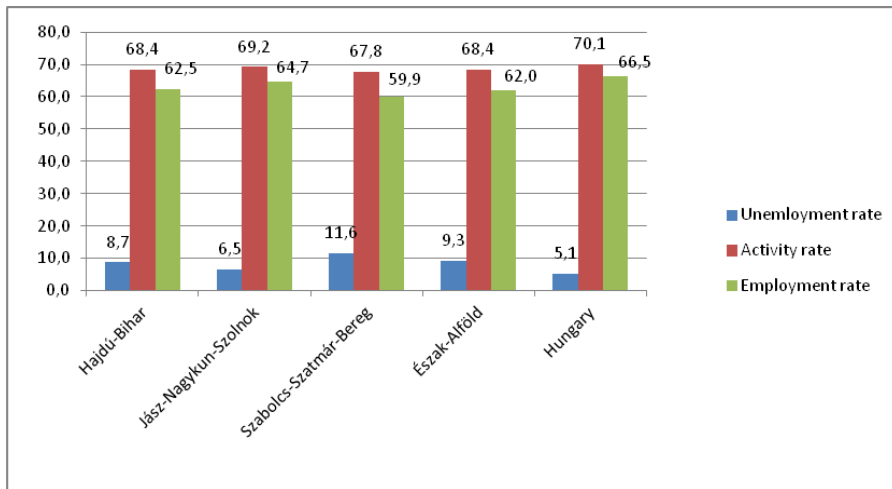
There are similar data in South Transdanubia (62.2%). It is important to note that while in 2014 the South Great Plain Region was characterized by nearly the same employment data as the Northern Great Plain, two years later it already belonged to the regions with somewhat more favourable conditions. The employment gap between the two regions has increased from 2.4% to almost 4% within two years. The regions with the best labour market indicators include Central Hungary (70.8%), Western Transdanubia (68.9%) and Central Transdanubia (68.4%). Moreover, there is no doubt that the regional employment situation has improved, since the employment rate has increased by 14% between 2009 and 2016. (KSH, 2016)

The unemployment rate of the region is 4.2% higher than the Hungarian average, which is 5.1%. There are significant unemployment disparities within the region, as the unemployment rate of Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok county (6.5%) only slightly exceeds the national average while the unemployment rate of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county is nearly twice as high (11.6%), which is the worst nationwide.

These data show that there has been an improvement in the employment indicators of recent years, but the increasing demand on the labour market does not affect the Hungarian regions to the same extent. It should also be mentioned that the increased demand for labour should be considered a positive change, although the demand and supply disparities cannot be ignored.

Chart 6

Employment/Activity/Unemployment rates of counties in the North Great Plain region, among people between the age of 15-64 (%) in 2016



Source: own edition

https://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xstadat/xstadat_eves/i_qlf031.html

Based on the latest data of regions, the disadvantages revealed by employment data of Northern Hungary, South Transdanubia and Northern Great Plain regions are apparent. Regarding age groups, the difficulties of the 15-19 and the 20-24 year-old population are significant. Studying gender distribution the disadvantage of women can be seen. Looking at the employment and unemployment situation by gender, the following can be seen in relation to the examined region.

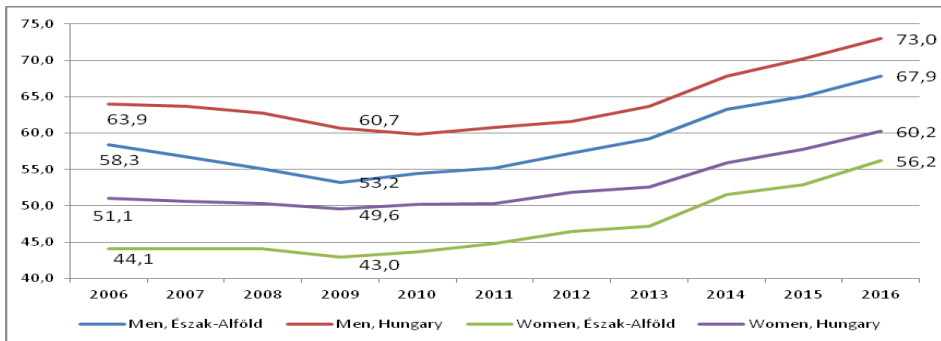
Women and men in the labour-market

The difference between the employment of women and men can be observed both at national and regional level. On a national average the employment rate for both sexes is growing, however, men's data shows a faster growth, compared to the lowest indicators measured in 2009, is 12.3% for men and 10.6% for women. The gap between the two sexes was 12.8% in 2016.

The employment level of the region are below the national level. The employment gap between men and women in the region is 11.7%. It is also apparent that the employment of men in the region is 5.1% and that of women is 4% less than the national average. Compared to the best-performing region (Central Hungary), the difference between the employment rate of men is 9.7%, while it is 7.6% in the case of women. It should also be noted, that, compared to the worst year of the crisis, the labor market opportunities of women living in the Northern Great Plain increased by 13.2%, while this increase regarding men is 14.7%. (Chart 7)

Chart 7

Employmen rate by gender, between the age of 15-64



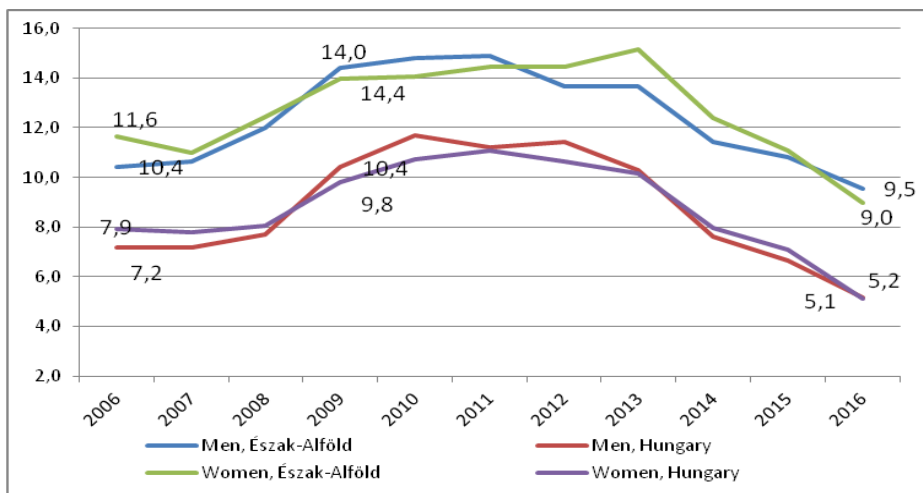
Source: own edition

https://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xstadat/xstadat_hosszu/h_qlf009a.html

The data show differences in both the unemployment rate and in the level of employment. The only exception is the national indicator regarding women and men, the difference was negligible 0.1% in 2016. Even on regional level the difference is insignificant: merely 0.5%. There were no significant differences at the peak of the occupational crisis in 2009, however, it is clear that, compared to the previous three years, men had to face a more negative trend at national and regional levels, which confirms that the employment difficulties emerging from the financial crisis had a more serious effect on men. The average of the improvement taking place in the following years was 5% at the social level. (Chart 8)

Chart 8

Unemployment rate distributed by gender, between the age of 15-64



Source: own edition

https://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xstadat/xstadat_hosszu/h_qlf012a.html

In summary, the employment situation including the economic activity and the unemployment of people living in the North Great Plain, is one of the worst in the country while among the counties of the region the disadvantage of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county can be observed.

The weak economic activity can be in connection with the level of educational attainment of the county's population. As compared to national average, in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County, which belongs to the North Great Plain Region, the data on highest level of education of the population in the 25-50 age group is the worst. (Varga 2015) (Table 1) In terms of gender distribution the situation of men is considerably worse. (Láczay-R Fedor 2017) The income poverty and the education level of parents correlate strongly with each other. The lower qualifications the parents have, the more probable it is that the child will grow up in poverty. (Varga 2015) Another problem is that the family model associated with schooling will probably be passed on, thus the employment problems arising from undereducation are being reproduced.

Table 1

The educational attainment of the population in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county in the 25-50 age group

Maximum primary school	24,8%
Technical school	28,8%
Final exam in secondary school	27,5%
Higher education	18,9%

Source: Varga 2015.

The improvement in the education of the labour force supply can be a solution, but it is difficult to change the situation significantly in the short term, as educational reforms primarily affect young people at the beginning of their career. (Csillag Edition 2015)

The integration of the low-skilled jobseekers is virtually impossible to the open (primary) labour market. The largest proportion of permanently unemployed people has low level of education. Long-term unemployment increases the risk of poverty and it mainly affects families with young children. 14 Out of 100 Hungarian children live in families in which one of the parents is unemployed, in the case of two-year-old or younger children this figure is 24%. In the Northern Great Plain, in 40% of the families with two-year old and younger children one of the parents does not work (Bass et al., 2008).

Employment attitudes of women with young children living in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county

The last part of the study presents some of the results of the research conducted in the most disadvantaged county of the North Great Plain Region.

The study interviewed women who are raising young children about their labour market situation, whether they have experienced disadvantages in the labour market due to raising children and what kind of working conditions they would consider to be ideal for themselves.

Based on the desired working conditions, women with young children were asked to select the most important and the least important three from the listed factors.

Table 2

Expectations regarding working conditions (N = 427)

	The most important (%)	The least important (%)
Salary	70.7	2.3
Working time that fits the nursery/kindergarten schedule	48.9	7.5
Flexible working time	22.2	15.9
Distance of the workplace from home	20.1	27.9
Distance of the workplace from nursery/kindergarten	12.2	23.4
Sick leave when the child is ill	48.0	3.3
Opportunity for professional development	9.8	34.2
Opportunity for career building, promotion	5.2	44.7
Job security	45.9	2.8
No stress	13.3	15.9
No compulsory overtime	8.0	29.5
Interesting job	5.6	33.3
Good atmosphere at the workplace	13.8	11.7

Source: own survey

Salary is the most important factor for about 70% of female respondents. For nearly half of the respondents the most important factors were that the beginning and the end of the working hours should correspond to the opening hours of the nursery / kindergarten and to be able to be on sick leave when the child is ill. Job security is also of great importance. Less important factors include flexible working hours and favourable location of the workplace (the workplace should be close to their home). The importance of the location depends on whether the respondents live in villages or towns. Mothers who live in villages consider this aspect more important than those who live towns or cities. This can be explained by the different infrastructural conditions. The least important factors include how interesting the job is, career development and promotion opportunities as well as the chance of the professional development.

It is obvious from the results that with regard to the circumstances and conditions of employment, most of the respondents think that salary is the most important factor as well as having a working environment that fits well to the changed family situation. The factors judged as the least important reveal that most of the respondents are characterised by low level of professional ambition, primarily those who have low qualification level. The correspondence between kindergarten / nursery and working time was ranked by every second person with a degree as one of the most important factors. Opportunities for career development were the least important for 50% of those who completed only 8 classes of the primary school and 48% of skilled workers. For those who completed high school and respondents with a degree this factor earned 35-30%. There were similar differences in judging professional development and promotion possibilities. 70% of the respondents emphasize the importance of wages, which shows that the primary motivation to work for women raising young children is financial constraint. The personal ambition to work or the desire for professional development matters only to a small percentage, at least in the family life cycle studied by the research.

At present, the proportion of people who work in atypical worktime is low in Hungary despite the fact that several Hungarian and EU recommendations support it as the most important condition of creating balance between family and work. The question *'What kind of working model would women raising young children consider to be ideal'* is primarily connected to worktime issue. In accordance with previous expectations, the traditional 8-hour working time was regarded ideal by only 12.5% of the total sample. The percentage of those who chose telework was even lower (3.5%). Employment in flexible working time was the most desirable form of employment. Part-time work was the second most popular working model, but not the best one. Sixty percent of women chose flexible worktime, while only 20% of women said part-time work would guarantee the most ideal schedule for mothers, which means they think they could perform similarly at their workplace and at home as well.

The low percentage of those who regard part-time employment ideal is surprising in the light of previous research results, which revealed that most of the mothers raising young children (Szűcs 2005; Frey 2002) would prefer to have part-time job. This can be explained by the fact that the less income due to shorter working hours cannot be afforded by the majority.

In addition, fixed-time, eight-hour working time is not ideal for creating balance between working and family life. This explains the popularity of flexible working hours, which does not cause a loss of earnings, and people can freely decide when to work within the defined eight-hour working time, which will be of great help to mothers if they need to adapt to nursery / kindergarten opening hours. Overall, it can be clearly stated that the major part of the respondents emphasizes the priority of atypical forms of employment.

Respondents with low level of education would choose part-time jobs, while skilled workers, women who graduated from high school and women with higher education degree would prefer flexible working hours. The responds show a correlation of the number of children and the preference of traditional or atypical forms of employment. Part-time work would be preferred by mothers with three or more children. One quarter regard it to be the most ideal working time. However,

fewer than 12% of respondents raising less than three children believe that this type of work would be the best for mothers.

Thus, twice as many mothers with three or more children would choose part-time work than regular 8-hour working time, which can be explained by the fact that not only the flexible working hours are important for them, but they also consider it important that the number of hours spent on paid work should be lower than eight hours a day. Thus the saved extra time can be spent on raising children and household duties. (Table 3) This is in accordance with the neo-classical theory of human capital, according to which women with more children prefer activities that suit better to the use of time related to child rearing.

Table 3

Working patterns that are considered to be ideal by mothers, grouped on the basis of the number of children (%), (N = 427)

	Number of children			
	1	2	3 and more	Total
8-hour working time	13,5	11,7	11,1	12,6
Part time job	19,7	17,8	25,0	19,4
Flexible working time	57,2	65,5	52,7	59,7
Telework	3,9	2,5	5,6	3,6
Does not know	2,2	1,9	11,1	2,1
No respond	3,5	1,1	11,1	2,6
Total (%)	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

Source: own survey (Fisher's $p= 0,047$)

The preference of flexible working time was typical for all three groups regardless of the number of children. However, while comparing the proportion of the respondents, it was found that the proportion of mothers with only one child and mothers with three and more children who chose flexible working hours is nearly the same. Flexible working time was considered the most appropriate atypical form of employment by 65.5% of mothers with two children. This shows 8% and 12% difference compared to the opinion of women with one and three or more children.

The research results also show that women, while trying to create balance between family- and employment-related roles, would largely rely on the help of their partners, especially in child rearing and housework activities.

Summary

This present study introduced the labour market situation of women in the North Great Plain region, in one of the most disadvantaged regions of Hungary. The article focused on the international and national characteristics as well as the significant employment differences. Within the region, the disadvantage of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county is significant. This is the reason why the research focused on the

labour-market role of women living in this county. The disadvantageous situation of women on the labour market is primarily due to the family life cycle impact.

Having children, and number of children significantly influence the employment status of the mothers. In terms of the expectations about the working conditions the financial factor has been given priority. The second most important factor is the work environment that can adapt to the changed family circumstances and enables the employee to give priority to child rearing. Factors related to professional ambitions can be found at the end of the ranking. It indicates that building a working career is of secondary importance in the life cycle when women raise young children. This attitude is reinforced by the fact that the majority of women considers flexible working time the most ideal form of employment.

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AZ ÉSZAK-ALFÖLDI RÉGIÓBAN ÉLŐ NŐK MUNKAERŐ-PIACI SZEREPVÁLLALÁSA

R. Fedor Anita

A nemzetközi és hazai foglalkoztatási trendeket figyelembe véve a tanulmány bemutatja az Észak-alföldi régióban élő nők munkaerő-piaci helyzetét.

Magyarországon a 2008-as pénzügyi válság negatív hatásai 2013-tól kezdtek enyhülni. Ennek eredményeként a foglalkoztatási helyzet egyre kedvezőbb képet mutat, mára a magyarországi foglalkoztatási ráta csak kis mértékben marad el az uniós átlagtól.

Az országot a foglalkoztatás és a munkanélküliség tekintetében jelentős regionális egyenlőtlenség jellemzi. Észak-Alföldön Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg megye gazdasági mutatói a legrosszabbak. A munkanélküliségi ráta több mint kétszerese az országos átlagnak, a foglalkoztatási ráta az átlagtól 6,5 százalékkal marad el. Országos és regionális szinten a nők foglalkoztatási rátája messze elmarad a férfiak foglalkoztatási arányától.

A gyermekvállalás és a gyermekek száma jelentősen befolyásolja az anyák foglalkoztatási mutatóit. A nők hátránya a munkaerőpiacon elsősorban a családi életciklus hatásának köszönhető.

A gyermeket nevelő nők munkakörülményekkel kapcsolatos elvárásait feltáró regionális empirikus munkám eredménye alapján megállapítható, hogy a

munkakörülményeket befolyásoló tényezők közül a pénzügyi feltételek (munkabér) bizonyultak a legfontosabbnak. A második leglényegesebb tényező olyan munkakörnyezet, amely alkalmazkodni tud a megváltozott családi körülményekhez, és figyelembe veszi a gyermeknevelés elsődleges szerepét. A szakmai ambíciókkal kapcsolatos tényezők csoportja a rangsor végén található, ebből arra lehet következtetni, hogy a karrierépítés másodlagos abban az életciklusban, amikor a nők gyermekeket nevelnek. Ezt támasztja alá az is, hogy a nők határozott többsége a rugalmas munkaidőt tartja a legmegfelelőbb foglalkoztatási formának. A munkakörülményekkel kapcsolatos elvárásokat a gyermekek száma és az anyák iskolai végzettsége, a partner jelenléte, annak gazdasági aktivitása és iskolai végzettsége is jelentősen befolyásolta. Az eredmények a női prekariátus jelenségét hangsúlyozzák.