

# Labour Market Position of Women in Hungary

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## Abstract

The political and economic transformation, the structural transformation of economy happening in the last 20 years had different effects on men and women. Although the market's conditions of competitions are the same for both gender so they neutral from the genders' perspective, the success of adapting the conditions is different between men and women because of the different characteristics and social role of each gender. The market's conditions of competitions are less favourable for women than men due to their social situation's characteristics. This is partly associated with their individual characteristics, set of roles learnt during the process of socialisation, value system, expectations and ambitions. These factors significantly weaken their position on the labour market, moreover, without sufficient protection, they increase their labour market disadvantages and in the cases of certain groups of women, they cause impoverishment.

**Keywords:** women's employment, horizontal and vertical segregation, glass ceiling, pay gap

## Introduction

By now in the member states of the EU, several chances regarding the situation of women were created in many respect but the inequalities between men and women still can be detected in several areas. According to the EuroBarometer, international survey on intolerance and discrimination, the 48% of the Hungarian population think that being a woman is a disadvantage in the society and only 6% of them think that being man is disadvantageous. Hungary was the only country where the relative majority of the respondents claimed that the discrimination based on gender is stronger than five years earlier. The number of possible inequalities is big but they can be categorized in the following problem fields non-exhaustively.

- a) The role perception that relegated women to the households: Among the men, the view on the traditional family division of labour is more widespread; within this group the acceptance of this view is more common among men who have only primary education.
- b) According to the time-scale studies, the Hungarian women spent most of their time with housework and child rearing. They spent more time on activities bond by the society is than men did, while the women's time spent on activities chosen freely is way less than men's.
- c) The chances for returning to the labour market have been decreasing since the 90' for those who received fee for childcare. The lack of institutions that supports the balancing workplace and family, the absence of proper development of services, drastic reduction in

the nurseries' capacity and lack of new type of services that substitute them contribute significantly to this phenomenon.

- d) The principle of "the same salary for the same work" set by legislation is still not prevailing; moreover, the average income of women is below that of men.
- e) The education indicators of women are better than that of men – regarding the distribution of those who learn in secondary or higher education and literacy as well –; in spite of this, they can have less chance to get managerial positions in intellectual life and to get academic qualifications than men can.
- f) The women are under-represented in politics too. Only 9,5% of the members of parliament are women.
- g) Many factors prevent women in participation in economy, building career; as a result, we can hardly find women in the most prestigious, the most powerful positions.
- h) Most of the feminised professionals are the lowest socially prestigious professionals as well.
- i) Because of their sexual affiliation, the women become victims of rape, domestic violence, sexual harassment at workplace, psycho terror at workplace, prostitution and other crimes.

### **1. Labour Market, Career**

In the modern societies, one of the most important components of social status is the individual's job, that is, the individual's position in the social division of labour. Therefore, the characteristics of labour market, that is the individual performance's place to get unfolded, have significant importance relating the evolution of social stratification. The differences between men and women can be traced back to two dimensions, to biological-genetic determination and social-cultural effects. The biological differences primarily appear in two ways relating labour market. Firstly, the discriminative processes relating childbearing and the disadvantages and problems resulted from it; secondly, the situations resulted from psychical differences. In the modern arrangements, there is less and less profession that the women would not be able to do due to their psychical strength compared the archaic societies. Therefore, in the genders' different occupational structure, the psychical performance has minor role. In contrast, the childbearing has greater effects on the market place chances. As for the labour market competition, the reliability, the reliability on an employee more exactly, for long-term, have great importance. This approach lead to the fact that during searching for or keeping a job, having a child or willingness to have one in the near future are sorting factors. Because of this practice, the women have very disadvantageous position in the labour market competition and it is harder for them to reconcile career with family life than for men.

The horizontal segregation, that is, the separated presence of men and women at the level of elementary occupation is proved by the fact that 30% of the occupations are heavily or completely feminised in Hungary: this is where the three-quarters of employed women work. These occupation: health visitor, nurse, typist, stenographer, maternity nurse, kindergarten teacher, pay-roll clerk, beautician, seamstress, kitchen helper, cleaning woman, financial referee. On the other pole, there are the male-dominated occupations and 54% of the professionals belong to here, such as, electrician, paver, mason, carpenter and scaffolder. Therefore, the ratio of masculine jobs is almost twice bigger than that of feminised jobs. In contrast, the vertical segregation can be measured by how the men and women appear in the

hierarchy in the labour market. The general experience was that most of them men had higher positions while most of the women had lower ones. More than half of the earner women are white-collar workers while this proportion of men is smaller than one-third. In spite of this, it is true that the more we go down the hierarchy of professions, the more and more women we find. The sub-proportion of women who have senior manager position is below the one-third level. (Frey é.n.)

60% of the European Union population who have tertiary level education attainment is women. This proportion prevails in Hungary too. However, it is still encounters significant difficulties – by totally utilizing their potentials – for them to get the proper jobs, position in accordance with their qualifications. One of the main complicating factors is finding the balance between labour market and family responsibilities that is strongly connected with the problem of the permanently existing gender stereotypes. The gender stereotypes severely limit the school and professional career of men and women, significantly contribute to the gender segmentation of the labour market and result in the unequal distribution of men’s and women’s family responsibilities, working hours, incomes. At the same time, they hinder women’s professional career and to get decision-maker position as well.

Although, the fact that women have significant advantages regarding acquiring diploma, this does not induce any change in the gender’s proportion regarding business and political occupations that accompanied by more responsibilities and significant social prestige. This is significantly in contradiction with the fact that the women are overrepresented by now regarding the number of business, public administration and law diplomas. They have significant lag in terms of share of political power. The women’s role-taking in the politics is extremely low. In order to have real impact on the politics, their rates should be over 30%, but the rate of Hungarian women representatives is only 9,5%. In addition, the fact that the women are ousted from power is demonstrated by that only every fourth member of each European Union member state’s government is a woman, but this rate shows significant differences in each member state since their rate is between 0 and 60%. In Hungary, there is not a female minister. As the European Commission’s report<sup>1</sup> states, visible and invisible practices and structures, the gender stereotypes, factors resulted from difficulties in finding balance between career and family life still hinder women to occupy highly prestigious leadership positions.

## **2. Glass ceiling, glass wall, and labyrinth**

The women’s employment is pyramid structured even among the highly qualified women regardless whether we examine competitive sector, politics, education or academic life. While in the bottom of the pyramid is full with women, they are very rare in the top (Koncz 2009). The metaphors for the factors (the factors that prevent women from becoming leaders) explain this specific structure became extremely popular in academic and everyday communication by now. The categories of “glass ceiling”, “glass wall” and “labyrinth” can be primarily highlighted. The “glass ceiling” as the oldest used concept, by symbolizing vertical segregation, displays the

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<sup>1</sup> Commission of the European Communities – Report for the Commission, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions: The equality between men and women – 2009 Brussels, 27.02.2009 COM (2009) 77.

process in which the ambitious female leaders face invisible obstacles during the career building and stuck at middle management level in large number. In contrast, the metaphor of glass wall relates to horizontal segregation. As a result, the penetrability between the segmented areas by gender is extremely limited and makes impossible for women to change “feminised” professions (HR, accounting) for professions that provide better chances for promotion. However, the latest international research findings emphasize that during the career building of women, it is not enough to focus on obstacles symbolized by glass ceiling because their getting ahead is not linear but rather a labyrinth where they need to face more and more obstacles in order to get ahead. The metaphor of labyrinth is used for describing it and it can be structured as follows: 1. the labyrinth starts with the prejudices that favour men and punish women: the men are promoted sooner even if their attainments are the same. It happens even in the case of feminised jobs like education and care. 2. The obstacles continue with the resistance to women leaders: the people accept successful female managers less because they are pushy, selfish and considered unpleasant. 3. The labyrinth includes the leadership style and credibility since the women have to be “feminine”, sympathetic to others but determined and assertive contracting leaders at the same time. 4. Although the expectations from female leaders regarding doing housework have changed, the balancing between work and family life will be an eternal task for them, especially if we compare their situations to be men’s. (Eagly-Carli 2007, cited by Nagy 2009: 61) Analysts took into consideration and proved that the women’s career building process is slower than men’s. This is confirmed by data set which states that the number of female researchers significantly increased in the beginning of the 90’s, then it has been at the same level since 1995: the feminization ration is 51,9 among them, it means there is 51,9 female researchers for 100 male researchers. This indicator is 57,64 in the higher education sector, 61,71 in the budgetary institutions, 29,22 in the business sector. In spite of these, the tendencies show that the women’s scientific involvement is increasing simultaneously with the needs of occupying leadership positions. According to the international statistics<sup>2</sup>, the women’s chances for occupying leader scientific positions have not been changed since 1990, but the men’s chances for career have remained steadily. The career building of women mainly stuck at the middle management level, that is, they have less successful career than men do, even if they have the same qualifications. Moreover, they need more time for it than the other gender. The basic difference in the success of careers between the gender is basically the dynamics, the men’s reach the top of their career quickly then become stagnant while the women moving upward on their career path in a balanced way after getting over the stagnant stage of it. Despite all these, we can see that the highly qualified women represent themselves in the academic world but the disadvantages do not typically turn up here, rather when they stall in their career path usually during the period of child bearing and get multiplied by the number of years they spend with it (Csépe 2008). This effect is amplified by the phenomena prevailing in the decision preferences and attitude: mainly the glass ceiling effect which blocks women from ore statuses that is prestigious and ensure the society’s appreciation more and more income; secondly, the lack of chance consciousness. Analysts point out that one of the main aim in this area should be to earn women more likely willing to participate in the masculine area by increasing their self-

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<sup>2</sup> Mapping the Maze (2008): Getting More Women to the Top in Research

confidence. For all these, they should achieve the “critical mass” at social development level to carry out not adapting to the majority in the organizational and work culture primarily. Beáta Nagy (2009) drew the attention that according to the international data, if the process pace of becoming leader for women remains the same, then more 73 years will be required until there will be equal amount of men and women in the leading positions of the 100 biggest companies. However, more 200 years can pass until the ratios of genders will be the same in politics in Hungary.

### **3. Occupation segregation, feminized occupations**

In Hungary, the increasing women employment is accompanied by two contradictory trends for long-terms. On the one hand, the women had more and more jobs that were only male job before. On the other hand, because of their mass inflow, more and more jobs had women employees and became feminine professions (light industry, education, health care, social services). Both tendencies are natural result of the women employment, the extent of feminizing is depending on which tendency becomes dominant in the development of the employment.

The segregation forces the women into “velvet ghetto” i.e. into low-level positions, statuses that are comfortable but provide little opportunity to get into upper hierarchy. It can be observed that men and women prefer jobs where their gender dominates when they choose their occupation. Four-fifth of women has “feminine’ jobs while the three-quarters of the men have masculine jobs. However the optimal utilization of the society’s capacity to work would require that the men and women employment should happen in a way that takes into account their skills and physiological abilities. Since the men’s and women’s skills and abilities are different, the occupational segregation by gender is a natural consequence of the society’s dual gender characteristics. Only those labour market mechanisms form it to be disadvantages that partly cause the devaluation of feminine jobs in Hungary and conversely, those jobs have mass of female employee – because of technical, economic, social causes that are interrelated to each other – that get devaluated.

The occupational segregation is maintained by the labour market’s operational mechanisms that are transmitted and strengthened by the process of socialisation. The – feminised – jobs, that have higher proportion of female employee, are infiltrated and fixed in the society’s consciousness as if they were jobs that were assigned to women originally. This is the so-called self-fulfilling process. The socialisation transmits and reproduces the values fixed during the labour divisions that are realized by the women’s career orientation in practice. According to Hungarian and international experiences, the majority of women – despite the massive propaganda – choose occupation that is traditionally determined to be feminine.

The social inequalities between men and women can be observed in the time usage and the ratio of leisure-working hours. In Hungary, the concept of housework is clearly linked to women’s work. Even today, in the beginning of the XXI century, the women spend more than three times much time on housework, shopping, childcare than men. According to the last 15-20 years of Hungarian researches, the vast majority of the Hungarian population had conservative opinion of the equal opportunities of men and women. Based on comparative

international researches, it can be told that the traditional division of labour, excessive workload of women and acknowledgement of this fact are typical in Hungary.

The women's economic activity has decreased drastically after the political transformation and it was accompanied by some kind of change in the value system: the acceptance of women employees decreased among both men and women and the acceptance of staying home increased at the same time. The role perception that divides the world into masculine and feminine was strengthened. Although some measurements were introduced in order to reduce this, a very little change has been noticed in the practice so far: for the real breakthrough, a more significant change is needed in the labour division of the family and in the value system of the society. Today, relating to this, as a result or accompanying phenomenon, a reversal can be observed in the public opinion towards the modern role perception: "... a significant change occurred in the opinion of roles in the past decade in Hungary. It became modernised and the value system became more work-orientated, the clear family and child centeredness are forced back to some extent. It became more accepted that the earning activities of the mothers do not necessarily have negative effects on the family life and the development of the children, moreover, the dual-earner family model is an essential requirement in terms of the stability and security of the family." (Pongrácz-S. Molnár 2011: 205)

#### **4. Income inequalities**

In Hungary the rate of income i.e. the gender pay gap is 17,7% which is in accordance with the European Union average (Rigler-Vanicsek, n.y.). However, in modelled, non-discriminatory situation taking into consideration only the structural factors (age, location, educational attainment, number of children, the job's sector, status at workplace), we would observe that the men's average income would be less than that of women<sup>3</sup>. All the discriminatory effects compensate and turn over this structural situation and result in the 17,7% pay gap for the men's advantage (Pongrácz-S. Molnár 2011: 205). Two of the reasons for this discriminatory effect are particularly important: the educational attainment and work experience. According to the effect of educational attainment, the higher the women's educational level, the more powerful discrimination they have to face. Despite the simultaneous growth of work experience, that is, the increase of the working years of both gender, the men's pace of salary growth is faster than that of women. This is confirmed by the research in which they followed the careers of the Technical University of Budapest graduates. According to the findings, when they started to work, the salary of the women graduated in 2004 was only the 72,2% of the men who graduated in the same year and as the time kept passing towards the present, the tendency was getting worse. (Szabó 2009)

This permanent income disadvantages are maintained by – in addition to the known structural effects (vertical and horizontal segregation mechanisms) – certain social categorization acts among women as well, for example conflicts inside relating professional and gender roles and the level of self-esteem (Váriné 2010). This can be explained with theoretical correlation with the focus on gender (gender specific), organisation (organisation-structure-specific) and collectively on genders and organizations (gender-organisation-system) (Nagy 1996). According

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<sup>3</sup> Using the Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition method (Rigler & Vanicsek n.y.)

to the correlation focusing on genders, the women cannot get highly prestigious job with the same chances like men because their personal abilities prevent them. As for the abilities, the mainly determining factors are characteristics of the different gender socialisation mechanism and the different education of the two genders. However, the theories focusing organisations emphasise that internal structural relations, chances for mobility and career persistence of gender segmentations. Those approaches became popular that combine both points of view, that is, focus on both individual and organisation; these approaches emphasise the effects of the presented factors' interactions. This is reinforced by the correlation stating, "the women construct their self-image, life and environment differently from men, therefore, their needs and possibilities for career are different as well". (Gallos cited by Koncz 2008:15) The consequences of it was proved by the data recording<sup>4</sup> of 2009 that interviewed 8000 students who study in higher education about their visions of future and their labour market plans connected to their studies i.e. the usefulness of their diploma. According to it, the women consider their situation less favourable than men so not the bigger salary that motivates them to get diploma. According to their formulated need of income, they require the average 25 000 HUF smaller amount of income than men who get job on the same area. The research results show that the women mostly want to avoid unemployment with their diplomas – they would like to earn independence, increase of their ability of self-supporting and community's appreciation by their diploma. The men's are motivated to get diploma significantly by the bigger amount of income and getting leadership positions. This assumes further differences between the men's and women's aspirations and chances regarding career, in terms of future as well.

## **Conclusion**

In Hungary, the women employment decreased significantly and the unemployment among them increased rapidly as a result of the deteriorated labour market conditions after the political transformation. The women's position on labour market deteriorated way more than the men's positions, for the women, the market and labour market competition had unfavourable effect on them. In Hungary, the labour market ranks the professions and positions to the detriment of women and application and promotion discrimination significantly restrict the equal chances. Regardless of the women educational level is higher, the occupational and educational concentration limit their competitiveness and career chances on labour market. The mechanism of feminisation forces them down on the bottom of the employment hierarchy where the chances for promotion, available income and job security is worse than the average and consequently the risk of poverty is bigger. The earning gap between the two genders has persistently remaining. The employment is an important factor of the financial independence of both men and women. It is a fundamental question: how much do the tax systems, social services or means of labour market encourage the women's success entry in the labour market. The European Commission (2008) Renewed Social Agenda: In the Opportunities, Access and Solidarity in the XXI century Europe release, besides emphasising solidarity, it highlighted that

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<sup>4</sup> Research Program of 2009, Tracking Graduates' Career made by *Educatio Public Services Non-profit LLC*.

the chances can be created by creating more and better workplaces and it can also mean the promotion of equality of the genders and supporting families as well.

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