

Roma Women's Unemployment in Hungary
Research-Based Assessment and Recommendations
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Introduction

This paper is written on behalf of the Roma Women's Initiative¹ of the OSI (Open Society Institute) and it is part of RWI's efforts to collect existing research evidence and data throughout the CEE and SEE region based on which policy recommendations can be formulated both at the national, regional and European level in order to support Roma women's participation in the labor-market. Due to the lack of official ethnic data on Roma² (and their employment) in most of these countries – and thus, lack of gender-desegregated data as well – an evaluation of Roma women's employment status can only rely on the review of existing research literature. Since such information tends to be available in pieces in national and local surveys - rather than in the few multi-country, or regional studies³ - the paper takes the example of Hungary, and suggests to be read as a case study.

Even though a number of studies were published in recent years in Hungary on the position of Roma in the labor market, it is noteworthy that most of these studies entirely lack the gender perspective, in at least two ways. Firstly, Roma women continue to be invisible in most surveys and publications, despite their very marginalized position in the labor market that will be demonstrated shortly. This paper will demonstrate Roma women's specific labor-market position through contrasting it, where possible, to Roma men's; however, it must be emphasized that Roma men's labor-market position is indeed very vulnerable and must be addressed urgently by policy-makers. Secondly, most studies lack the gender perspective in that they continue to reproduce a narrow interpretation of 'economy' and 'work' – only focusing on the formal economy, and interpreting work as paid work only. Usually no attention is paid to the connection between Roma women's productive and reproductive roles, which indeed is key to understanding some of the reasons behind Roma women's labor-market position. This paper will highlight some of these connections and challenge the validity of traditional labor-market concepts for understanding and addressing Roma women's labor market situation.

¹The Roma Women's Initiative (RWI) is a network of Roma women activists in Central and Eastern Europe, founded in 1999 by the Open Society Institute's Network Women's Program in order to develop, link and catalyze a core group of committed Roma women leaders in an effort to improve human rights of Roma women in CEE. Through programs on networking, capacity-building, technical assistance, leadership development, educational and economic empowerment, advocacy and lobbying, RWI ultimately seeks to prepare Roma women activists to address discrimination and advocate for policy change at local, national and international levels. For more information see <http://www.romawomensinitiatives.org>

² Due to the strict interpretation of data protection regulations, practically no official statistics are available on Roma. The number of Roma people in Hungary is estimated to be between 550.000-600.000 currently, however, there are frequent debates around estimates, and around how to define who counts as Roma.

³ European Commission, Directorate on Employment and Social Affairs, The Situation of Roma in an Enlarged European Union, 2004, and UNDP, Faces of Poverty, Faces of Hope, 2004.

I. The position of Roma women in the Hungarian labor-market, key issues

Economic transition has led to mass unemployment and continued, high economic inactivity among Roma men and women

From the late 80-ies into the early 90-ies, about 40% of formerly employed Roma lost their jobs – compared to about 10% of the majority population.⁴ Mass unemployment during the economic transition in Hungary hit the Roma first – mainly because many Roma were employed in low-value, poorly skilled jobs, in industries that suffered great losses or full restructuring. However, the mass unemployment cannot be fully explained by Roma workers' overrepresentation in low-value, low-skilled jobs low and in particular industries, thus the element of ethnic discrimination is supported by this. As a result, about 70% of adult Roma men and 80% of Roma women were economically inactive or unemployed in Hungary in 1993⁵.

A recent survey⁶ reinforces that the 70-80% inactivity level has remained unchanged among the Roma and suggests that exclusionary tendencies have been sustained in the past 12 years - despite the economic development in Hungary that took place from about 1997 and achieved by now a generally modest unemployment rate. Thus, it can be argued that the Roma have become the losers of the economic transition at least in two ways. They were hit by mass unemployment hardest at early stages of the transition, and they were excluded from the economic consolidation that took place from the second half of the 1990-ies. While these processes impacted both Roma men and women, however, gender differences are significant:

Economic activity among adult Roma men and women (age 19 and above)⁷

	Total (%)	Roma men (%)	Roma women (%)
Full-time studies	4,7	7,1	2,4
Economically active	25,2	32,1	18,4
Unemployed	35,9	38,1	33,9
Childcare, household support	13,4	0,3	26,0
Pensioner	5,4	5,7	5,0
Disability living allowance	15,4	16,7	14,3

About 32% of Roma men and 18% of Roma women have registered, paid employment. Unemployment among Roma men and women is similarly high, 34-38%. In addition, a quarter of Roma women are at home on childcare or work in the household. The very low ratio of pensioners among both Roma men and women is related to early mortality and exclusion from economic activity thus lack of access to social security. The poor health status of many Roma people is reflected in the high ratio of those who receive disability allowance, which, at the same time, is also believed to be a form of unemployment benefit. In summary, although economic

⁴ Gábor Kertesi, *Cigány foglalkoztatás és munkanélküliség a rendszerváltás előtt és után*, Esély, 1995. 4. Pp. 19-63.

⁵ István Kemény, *Roma gyerekek az iskolában, roma felnőttek a munkaerőpiacon*, A Falu 10, 1995. Pp.47.

⁶ Ferenc Babusik, "A szegénység csapdájában", Research Report, 2004. Budapest, p.13. This representative survey is one of the few studies which offers data on Roma women's labour-market participation, as well as data on Roma households as units. Other researchers found similar activity rates, while unemployment data shows significant variations.

⁷ Ferenc Babusik, "A szegénység csapdájában", Research Report, 2004. Budapest, p.13

inactivity is high among both Roma men and women, almost twice as many men work or study full time (39,2%), than Roma women do (20,8).

Education and economic activity go hand in hand

Roma women's educational background strongly influences their level of economic activity. As one can see below, while unemployment is high in all groups, women who lack educational qualifications, remain at home to a great extent on childcare or receive disability allowance. At the same time, Roma women who possess vocational training or secondary school qualification, are much more likely to have paid work. Research evidence suggests that at least vocational qualification or secondary school education is needed for offering a realistic labor-market entry as alternative to childcare/ household work– even if unemployment remains to be high here as well.

Economic activity of Roma women according to educational background⁸

	Total	Incomplete elementary education	Complete elementary education	Vocational training	Secondary school	Higher education (college, university)
Full-time studies	2,4		2,2	0,2	12,7	
Economically active	18,4	2,9	13,3	45,5	36,9	78,4
Unemployed	33,9	30,2	39,8	29,8	35,3	21,6
Childcare, household support	26,0	23,5	38,3	18,7	11,4	
Pensioner	5,0	12,4	0,4	1,8	0,7	
Disability living allowance	14,3	31,0	6,0	3,9	3,0	

However, Roma women's educational background on average continues to be weak, poorer than Roma men's and poorer than that of the majority population. Elder Roma women are particularly disadvantaged and practically fully excluded since the predominant majority of them have not completed elementary school. Even in the age group 35-48, about 80% of Roma women possess at best elementary school qualification – as we have seen above, insufficient for a labor-market entry. In the younger generation of Roma women (ages 19-34) however, about 40% of them have acquired vocational or secondary education, thus a potential for entering the labor-market. On the other hand, it still means that even today a fifth of young Roma women have not completed elementary education and a further 40% have not continued their studies after elementary school. In particular, Roma women in villages and segregated neighborhoods are at risk of finishing elementary school late or not completing at all.⁹ The case study of young Roma people in an economically depressed region found that under such circumstances Roma women's alternatives are reduced to childcare: they attend school until their first child arrives. Roma women's ability to gain employment in such regions is reduced to zero.¹⁰

⁸ Ferenc Babusik, "A szegénység csapdájában", Research Report, 2004. Budapest, p. 17.

⁹ Ferenc Babusik, Az ózdi régió cigány népessége, in Ferenc Babusik (ed.), A romák esélyei Magyarországon, Kávé Kiadó, Delphoi Consulting, 2002., p. 125.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Educational background of adult Roma men and women (age 19 and above)¹¹

	Total	Men	Women	Women 19-34	Women 35-48	Women 49-62	Women 63+
Incomplete elementary ed.	30,2	24,2	36,1	19,6	38,9	78,8	84,3
Complete elementary ed.	36,4	37,9	34,9	39,4	41,5	15,7	10,3
Vocational training	20,6	26,6	14,7	20,1	10,9	4,0	4,1
Secondary school	11,4	10,5	12,4	19,1	6,4		1,3
College, university	1,3	0,9	1,8	1,9	2,4	1,5	

In summary, the significance of education for Roma people in gaining access to employment has been reinforced by research evidence. Given the particularly disadvantaged educational background of many Roma women, their educational needs must be targeted at various levels, as will be discussed under the session on recommendations.

Roma women's employment significantly reduces threat of poverty for the family

Based on their income data, about 70-90% of the Roma in Hungary live below the official poverty line calculated by the so-called subsistence minimum.¹² The economic activity of Roma women is proved to be crucial in avoiding lasting poverty – a phenomenon that continues to threaten many Roma families in Hungary.¹³ It has been broadly recognized by researchers in Hungary that the number of employed people is one of the best indicators of poverty risks: families with 2 earners are very likely to escape poverty, and families with no earners are indeed likely to face it.¹⁴ Among Roma couples, while only in 12% of the cases are both partners employed and in 54% of couples both partners are inactive.

The table below shows the differences in work-related income level in Roma families, depending on the number of earners and number of children. It is worthy to note that having a child – even if just one child – makes all the difference in the per capita work-related income level in Roma families. Roma families with two earners are significantly better off than other Roma families, and interestingly, Roma families where only women are employed, produce more work-related income than families with men earners only.

Per capita work-related monthly income (in HUF)¹⁵

Number of children	Number of earners			Neither employed
	Both employed	Only man employed	Only woman employed	
No child	63918	33341	43271	21548
One child	48716	22406	27492	15375
Two children	31597	23533	27908	11622
Three children	31220	17645	19657	12297
Four or more children	25000	11303	7143	9200

¹¹ Ferenc Babusik, "A szegénység csapdájában", Research Report, 2004. Budapest, p. 9-10.

¹² Ferenc Babusik, Roma vállalkozások Magyarországon, Research Report, 2004., p. 23.

¹³ Zsolt Spéder, A szegénység változó arcai, Budapest, Századvég Kiadó, 2002.

¹⁴ Zsolt Spéder, A szegénység változó arcai, Budapest, Századvég Kiadó, 2002.

¹⁵ Ferenc Babusik, A szegénység csapdájában, Research Report, 2004. Budapest, p. 28.

It has been a powerful myth that Roma women do not work, because their families are better off if they live on various forms of welfare: childcare benefits, unemployment benefits, etc. The following table demonstrates that even if we take into account the various forms of welfare benefits, the per capita income of Roma families is by far the highest in case of the two-earner model. Roma families are financially much more interested in Roma women's employment, since it brings significantly more income to the family budget than any combination of welfare payments. Welfare benefits are insufficient to provide even for subsistence living: they are merely one element in the portfolio of families to make ends meet.

Various forms of income in Roma families¹⁶

Couples without children	Work-related income, HUF	Unemployment benefit, HUF	Childcare benefits, HUF	Social welfare payment /capita	Total income/capita	Net income/capita
Both partners employed	63918	0	0	0	66783	48901
Only man employed	33341	4003	0	1886	36752	25750
Only woman employed	43271	1616	0	1690	45769	32471
Neither employed	21548	2944	0	2652	25263	18299
Couples with a child or children						
Both partners employed	36277	0	9845	656	39422	30237
Only man employed	20222	714	19191	967	25277	18640
Only woman employed	24580	5369	13792	1800	29728	20236
Neither employed	11921	2482	21204	1937	18646	11802

In short, those 12% of Roma families with two earners are the likeliest to escape poverty, while the 54 % of Roma families with neither partners employed, are certainly below the poverty line. Families with only women earners have more income than families with men earners only, however, both are very likely to face poverty. Welfare payments do not compensate for the lost work-related income, in fact, only cover a fraction of subsistence costs.

Roma earners receive on average very low wages, as shown in the following table. The following table demonstrates that they need additional, temporary income on top of the very low average incomes to make ends meet. The table reinforces that women with no or basic education are practically unable to generate permanent income. The wage gap between Roma men and women is indeed clearly tangible. The only category where Roma women make significant money – and more than Roma men – is those women who have achieved a degree in higher education.

¹⁶Ferenc Babusik, "A szegénység csapdájában", Research Report, 2004. Budapest, p. 20.

Permanent and Temporary Income¹⁷

	Average		Men		Women	
	Permanent income	Temporary income	Permanent income	Temporary income	Permanent income	Temporary income
Incomplete elementary education	2932	3305	3743	4749	2345	2253
Complete elementary education	13166	6132	14763	7883	11325	4029
Vocational training	33705	9880	35196	13374	30968	3460
Secondary school	30952	6212	38472	10307	24688	2801
College, university	63569	13650	56574	37874	66838	2329

Even if widespread direct and indirect discrimination against Roma men and women is assumed by most researchers, no research has directly documented its actual operation, depth and intensity so far. Researchers emphasize that labor-market discrimination can be supported indirectly from many other phenomena, e.g. from the fact that the poor educational background alone does not explain the disproportionate loss of jobs, sustained high unemployment among the Roma, or wage gaps between Roma and not Roma employees.¹⁸ Based on similarly indirect evidence, e.g. wage gaps compared to majority women and Roma men, etc. we have reason to believe that Roma women face a double discrimination on the labor market. And yet, as we have shown above, if Roma women manage to gain registered employment despite the high number of disadvantages, discrimination etc, their families' potential for escaping poverty increases substantially.

Missing Roma women entrepreneurs among registered businesses – while plenty of evidence for business-like activities and skills

Even though the ethnicity of entrepreneurs is not registered in official statistics, a recent survey of about 350 Roma enterprises has shown that 85% of Roma entrepreneurs are men.¹⁹ Roma entrepreneurs constitute less than 10% of employed Roma people, and such businesses are in most cases micro enterprises with less than 10 employees, nevertheless, the average income of Roma entrepreneurs is significantly higher than that of other Roma families.

The educational background of the very few women entrepreneurs is relatively high – in fact, quite a few of them possess degrees in higher education – and most of the entrepreneur women were studying and employed prior to the launch of business activities, or were at home on childcare – yet, they were not unemployed. This certainly suggests that currently registered entrepreneurship is an option only for educated Roma women, with previous labor-market experience. Even if it is likely that women actively participate in the business activities of the other 85% of Roma enterprises, their work remains invisible.

¹⁷ Ferenc Babusik, “A szegénység csapdájában”, Research Report, 2004. Budapest, p. 26.

¹⁸ Gábor Kertesi, Cigány foglalkoztatás és munkanélküliség a rendszerváltás előtt és után, Esély, 1995. 4. Pp. 19-63.

¹⁹ Ferenc Babusik, Roma vállalkozások Magyarországon, Research Report, 2004.

Despite their absence from official business registries, it is a broadly recognized and documented notion that many Roma women are engaged in income generating business-like activities. Case studies²⁰ in villages have recorded various paid work activities that Roma women are routinely engaged in, e.g. seasonal or temporary agricultural labor, household assistance for other families, etc. Many of these activities require various business skills. In addition, it is often Roma women who are responsible for dealing with authorities²¹, arranging documents, payments, etc. – skills that are vital for managing a business. Case studies of Roma communities support the notion that Roma women often play a central role in ensuring their families' subsistence, organizing resources and providing for basic needs. Grandmothers²² in large families were found to be the ones to provide support for all family members, operate large networks and mobilize resources.

Unfortunately, no research has targeted so far the assessment of the informal or unregistered economic activity delivered by Roma men and women, neither the assessment of the household, caring etc. work delivered practically exclusively by Roma women. Thus, the following argument can be formulated only as a hypothesis, even if its elements can be supported by research.

We can reasonably assume that many Roma women are engaged in not registered income-generating activities, and that such work is vital for their families. There are various serious consequences for the women. Firstly, such work is not recorded by contracts, it is not registered in the social security system, thus does not give any protection for the women in case of rights abuses, illness, old-age etc. Roma women who do not have sufficient employment records, and/or were at home on childcare at times without having been registered in the social security system, are increasingly excluded from a range of benefits and services and are at risk of becoming totally invisible pariahs²³. Secondly, even if much of their work is not illegal - but simply unregistered - mainstream society easily associates door-to-door selling of second-hand clothes with stealing, smuggling etc. which, together with the known overrepresentation of Roma women among women in prison, contributes to their stigmatization and ultimately, criminalization. Thirdly, if we assume that Roma women's unregistered income-generating work and role in managing scarce resources for the family is especially vital for survival among the poorest families, those women who live in segregated ghettos/ villages in economically depressed regions, will remain to be closed into this gendered poverty trap. It is thus necessary to take various measures in order to encourage Roma women's entrepreneurship, as will be discussed under recommendations.

²⁰ Judit Durst, *Innen az ember jobb, ha meg is szabadul – Megélhetési stratégiák egy kistalusi cigány közösségben*, 2003., Péter Szuhay, *Foglalkozási és megélhetési stratégiák a magyarországi cigányok körében*, in Ferenc Glatz (ed.), *A cigányok Magyarországon*, MTA Társadalomkutató Központ, 2004, Budapest.

²¹ Judit Durst, *Innen az ember jobb, ha meg is szabadul – Megélhetési stratégiák egy kistalusi cigány közösségben*, 2003.

²² Ibid.

²³ See life story interviews in the research "Women, Integration and Prison – National Report, Hungary"- Research Report by CEU team, 2005, Budapest.

II. Policy environment, lessons and debates

Even if this paper focuses on employment, a few broader issues need to be mentioned first, since these influence the context of employment-related policies.

Data protection

-The currently dominant, strict interpretation of the Data Protection Act²⁴ (Act on the Protection of Personal Data and Freedom of Information, Act LXIII/ 1992) leads to the lack of statistical data on ethnicity, thus limits researchers and policy makers' ability to assess policy impact. Due to lack of large-scale, statistical data, existing knowledge is based on surveys, which have to follow complicated sampling procedures, creating further challenges. The fact that one has to rely on secondary research, especially reduces the possibilities for those who research topics relevant for Roma women, since due to a limited gender-sensitivity, most secondary research does not offer gender-based data or analysis. Thus most policies can hardly be evaluated regarding their impact on Roma women, if current, strict interpretation of data protection continues in Hungary.

Segregated housing

-Government declarations and plans to combat segregation and act against ghettos were not followed by actions. Research financed by the government in 1997 concluded that 96.000 Roma live in ghettos - although more recent estimates show a broad range from 36.000 to 200.000 people. A plan was drafted in 2001 to dismantle ghettos, however, no agreement was reached among ministries and experts. Ever since, no new plan or resource was set aside by the government. As analysts remark²⁵, governments were not ready to face the political risk involved in such actions, and local governments especially were not prepared/ or able to face the resistance from local population. The topic has remained on the agenda at least at the level of discourse: the state secretary for Roma affairs recently described a three-year plan to be financed by EBRD. The problem of segregation is not limited only to the issue of ghettos: an increasing number of Roma people live in areas with Roma neighbors mainly, although these are not classified as ghettos. All forms of segregated living negatively influence education potentials, available jobs, standard of living and housing, social networks and opportunities for enterprises, health status etc.²⁶ As we showed in previous sections, segregated living for Roma women often directly leads to early school leaving, no access to employment, and no alternatives to childbirth.

Anti-discrimination legislation

-A general legislation on anti-discrimination (Law about Equal Treatment and Promotion of Equal Opportunities, Act CXXV/ 2003) was created in late 2003. Even though discrimination in employment was prohibited by the Labor Code previously as well, the new law gives a detailed, elaborated description on various forms of discrimination in employment relationships, and reverses the burden of proof. Based on the law, a so-called Equal Treatment Authority was set up very recently, however, its operation cannot yet be evaluated. Some researchers²⁷ point out that the law arrived late, which reflects the general reluctance of political elites, state administration and middle classes to seriously tackle discrimination against Roma.

²⁴ For a discussion of the Data Protection Act and its interpretation see Andrea Krizsán, The Case of Hungary, in Andrea Krizsán (ed.), *Ethnic Monitoring and Data Protection*, Budapest, CPS Books, 2002. Pp. 157-199.

²⁵ János Zolnay, Szakítópróbák, in Mária Neményi, Júlia Szalai (eds) *Kisebbségek Kisebbsége*, Budapest, Új Mandátum Könyvkiadó, 2005, p. 197.

²⁶ Ferenc Babusik, *A szegénység csapdájában*, Research Report, 2004. Budapest.

²⁷ Kertesi Gábor, *A társadalom peremén – romák az iskolában és a munkaerőpiacon*, Budapest, Osiris, 2005., p. 20.

Institutionalization

-In the central government administration the representation of Roma issues at the policy level was institutionalized from 2002, however, its location in various ministries, its level in the decision-making hierarchy, and its name has changed several times. Currently there is a Roma Directorate within the Ministry for Youth, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. In each ministry there is a so-called 'Roma referent'. Some researchers point out that the dominant discourse is built on the equal opportunity approach advocated strongly from 2003, under which Roma issues, women's issues, and that of the disabled were often discussed together.²⁸

Labor-market programs

-The Hungarian government supported various Roma employment programs through two state-owned foundations from the mid-90-ies, however, the first conscious strategy, the so-called Medium-Term Package was approved by the government in 1997, and revised in 1999. (A new package was launched in 2003.) The Medium-Term Package required the cooperation of various ministries in order to support and integrate unemployed Roma people into the labor-market. The core element of such support was envisioned through public work and public utility work programs, as well as through a social land program.

An assessment of all 'active labor-market' measures in 2001 has reinforced, that the most often used tool in support of unemployed Roma people has indeed been through public work programs. Most such programs are not only available for unemployed Roma people, however, the Roma represent between 40% and 60% of participants. Research shows that more than 75%, up to 90% of those who took part in public work programs have not been reintegrated to the primary labor-market – in fact, public work programs are one element in the permanent cycle between unemployment benefit – and a few months of public work assignment.²⁹ Other 'active labor-market measures' such as retraining, wage cost contribution etc. were only available for a fraction of the Roma unemployed people. Generally, analysts point out that most state support goes into normative support, rather than project-based financing.³⁰ Changes in the financing of unemployment support in 2000 have left the above basic structures and tendencies in place.

Micro-credit programs

-The role of micro-credit programs in supporting Roma entrepreneurs has remained very marginal in Hungary.³¹ The state-financed general micro-credit program has not been adequate for Roma entrepreneurs, and NGO-s have had limited opportunities for running micro-credit programs due to strict banking regulations.

NGO programs

-Roma labor-market programs run by Roma organizations and financed by various donors including international and local NGO-s and state institutions throughout the 90-ies (1990-1999) were evaluated critically by a World Bank Report, mainly due to lack of sufficient focus on project financing as opposed to normative financing. The Report pointed out that a high number of projects 'only' aimed at ensuring subsistence living for participants for the duration of the projects, but were not sustainable without continued donor support. The World Bank Report also

²⁸ János Zolnay, Szakítópróbák, in Mária Neményi, Júlia Szalai (eds.) *Kisebbségek Kisebbsége*, Budapest, Új Mandátum Könyvkiadó, 2005, p. 195.

²⁹ Szilvia Orsovai, Ilona Palotai, Éva Pálincó, *A közhasznú foglalkoztatotti státusz reintegráló hatása a fővárosban*, Budapest, Fővárosi Önkormányzat, 2000.

³⁰ Róbert György Lukács, *Roma munkaerőpiaci programok és környezetük*, in Mária Neményi, Júlia Szalai (eds.) *Kisebbségek Kisebbsége*, Budapest, Új Mandátum Könyvkiadó, 2005. p. 113.

³¹ Róbert György Lukács, *Roma munkaerőpiaci programok és környezetük*, in Mária Neményi, Júlia Szalai (eds.) *Kisebbségek Kisebbsége*, Budapest, Új Mandátum Könyvkiadó, 2005. p. 101.

argued that most donors – whether state institutions or NGO-s – were not able to follow up the actual impact of their projects, and many had opposite or very different impact compared to the original objectives.³²

European Union funding

-EU support was significant through addressing Roma issues in the Accession Partnership and in Regular Reports. Financing projects mainly took place through Phare projects, however, Roma groups had often difficulties in accessing these funds – and most funds focused on projects in education.³³

The National Development Plan I. (2004-2006) under which EU structural funds and matching Hungarian government funds are translated into actual projects in various fields (economic development, regional development, human resources development, environment) emphasizes equal opportunities as an important principle. However, in most programs – above all, in economic development programs – equal opportunities are only a so-called horizontal principle which has to be taken into account, where appropriate. Under economic development no targeted programs for Roma businesses etc. or for economically disadvantaged regions have been established. Under regional development and human resources development, some targeted programs were designed for economically disadvantaged regions, as well as for unemployed people, among others, for Roma as well. However, no detailed assessments are available about project beneficiaries at this early stage of program implementation. Some researchers have pointed out that only few NGO-s have had sufficient operational, administrative etc. experience, tender routine, network, etc. in order to aspire for a successful proposal. Another challenge is that due to data protection regulations, there is often no data on the ethnicity of beneficiaries, etc., therefore the impact of such programs will hardly be measurable in this respect.

-The two most important policy debates in this field can be summarized as the following:

-Given that public work programs are not successful in aiding integration to the primary labor market, some experts argue for the need to shift away from public work programs, while others believe that the secondary labor market is the only real possibility for many unemployed people, among them, for Roma unemployed people.

-In order to avoid the danger of segregation, some experts suggest not to design specific (labor-market) programs for Roma people. Others argue that such programs are needed and do not lead to segregation if designed properly.

³² Róbert György Lukács, Roma munkaerőpiaci programok és környezetük, in Mária Neményi, Júlia Szalai (eds.), *Kisebbségek Kisebbsége*, Budapest, Új Mandátum Könyvkiadó, 2005. p. 107.

³³ *Monitoring the EU Accession Process: Minority Protection Vol. I.*, Budapest, OSI/ EU Accession Monitoring Program, 2002, p. 249.

III. Recommendations

Some general recommendations that follow from the above policy lessons - e.g. the need to act against segregated housing and schools – will not be repeated here, rather, the focus will be narrowed down to issues directly related to Roma women’s labor-market position and employment potential. Some of these recommendations can and should be considered as tools to improve Roma men’s labor-market position as well, however, we will only refer to Roma women below.

Given the particularly strong link between Roma women’s educational level and economic activity level, as well as the strong connection between Roma women’s economic activity and avoiding poverty for the whole family, investment into Roma women’s education is particularly rewarding. The analysis has demonstrated that at least a mid-level educational qualification is required to reach a potential for labor-market entry. Given the large differences according to age - and other variables³⁴ - targeted policy action is required to improve Roma women’s access to education and registered employment. The following are only some examples for such targeted actions:

- Vocational education (linked to job placement) in marketable professions should be organized as a priority, including women who have not completed elementary education, or have done so years ago³⁵.
- Retraining, job search and job placement should be made available for the above 30% unemployed Roma women among those who possess vocational or secondary education.
- Young school leavers (14-18) need special attention, their being particularly threatened by unemployment, or, partly due to lack of alternatives, early childbirth.
- The development of the kindergarten network - or alternatives to it – in rural Hungary, particularly in small villages, must be encouraged.
- Employers’ obligation to offer jobs to women returning from maternity benefit, must be enforced.
- Access to jobs in public administration must be ensured for Roma women and men, to be achieved by positive action, and example set by centrally administered government agencies.
- All government (central and local government) and state administration bodies should have organizational anti-discrimination policies, as well as complaint procedures.
- Entrepreneurship among Roma women should be strengthened by the following means:
 - Facilitating access to micro-credit programs for Roma women entrepreneurs.

³⁴ Due to space limitations I only list other variables that are proved to be important in influencing the level of education among Roma women: number of children, level of poverty, level of segregation, geographical area. Based on research by Ferenc Babusik, “A szegénység csapdájában”, Research Report, 2004. Budapest

³⁵ We do not wish to indicate that employment is a realistic target for all unemployed Roma women. Yet, many middle-aged Roma women are without work and education and so are young women as well – many of whom can be supported by such measures.

- Introduction of simple, entrepreneur-friendly administration and taxation rules for micro businesses.
- Special licenses allowing for the recognition of a range of seasonal, temporary, etc. jobs as “paid work” contributing to social security payments.

- In the field of unemployment support, a shift towards targeted, integration-oriented measures should be achieved (e.g. retraining, job creation and placement through wage support, social security support, tax allowances etc.) – instead of the current, almost exclusive focus on public work programs, which are very costly and yet do not manage to help integration to the labor market.

- The number and visibility of Roma programs and Roma beneficiaries should be increased in the programs supported from the National Development Plan. Access of a sufficient number of NGOs to structural funds and the creation of innovative labor-market projects is especially desirable.