RURAL AND URBAN FAMILIES ON THE PERIPHERY OF SOCIETY

Ágnes SIMONYI

Institute of Sociology and Social Policy, Eötvös Loránd University
Budapest, Pázmány sétány 1/a. H-1117; e-mail: arcosimonyi@axelero.hu

Abstract: The paper analyses the experiences of case studies with 120 families that belong to those who were hit hardest by the economic and social transition. The steadily disadvantageous situation of these families can be traced back to the labor market processes. Despite decreasing unemployment figures and several labor market programs there are still large groups – young people, women with small children, elderly middle-aged persons, the Roma – who can hardly reintegrate into permanent employment. For these people no good choices exist between low wages of available and often uncertain, formal and official jobs and between the irregular incomes from casual, precarious work supplemented with social allowances and benefits. The mobilization of all family resources, including often the work of children, may help to overcome daily problems of subsistence, however their family system is often in danger. Market instability, the loss of continuous income, health problems, tensions and emotional crisis situations often jeopardize the daily conduct of life, housing conditions and the future of children. In the lack of other subsistence strategies and family models this instability is going to be reproduced by the younger generations.

Keywords: poverty, ethnicity, labor market, housing

THE RESEARCH

This study gives an account of 120 family case studies that were prepared in the framework of several research projects during the past few years.¹ The aim was to provide information on families that were hit hardest by the economic and social transition. The research team visited and interviewed families who faced grave

¹ The family case studies were prepared at the Department of Social Policy and Social Work of ELTE University and with the help of the Hilscher Rezső Social Policy Association. The research was financially supported in 1999/2000 by the Foundation for Future Jobs, while in 2001/2002 it was continued in framework of a project financed by the UNDP and the Hungarian Central Statistical Office. The experiences of the first phase were summarized in the volume Ágnes Simonyi ed. (2001): 11 falu, 55 család. [11 villages, 55 families.] Budapest: Struktura Kiadó. The second series of interviews was summarized and compared with the experiences of the first one in the Closing Research Report II., Ágnes Simonyi ed. (2002): Rural and Urban Families Living Among Social Disadvantages. Budapest: UNDP-CSO, prepared at the end of the project Family in Transition coordinated by Judit Lakatos. All data of the CSO survey and the in-depth interviews are published in CD-ROM format as well.
employment-related problems, such as unemployment, under-employment, inactivity, irregular employment. Due to their poverty and indebtedness, these families regularly encounter crisis situations. They live among poor housing conditions, and even these poor housing facilities are frequently at risk. The members of these families struggle with diseases and chronic illnesses because they lack proper medical treatment. The living conditions of these families are not suitable to enhance the education and training of the grown-ups or the schooling of the children. In sociological and social-policy research such families and their members are called ‘disadvantaged families’, ‘poor families’, ‘families living in extreme poverty’, ‘peripheral strata’, ‘people with integration difficulties’, ‘socially marginalized’ or ‘excluded’. As for the size of this stratum, which is dependent on or in several times deprived of the social safety net, only estimates can be made. Their daily and repeatedly appearing crises and their attempts to find a way out can only be depicted by so-called intensive observation and in-depth interviews. Based on former research experience we are convinced that for the strengthening and integration of socially disadvantaged, marginalized families solutions need to be worked out on the basis of the analysis of the specific difficulties these people face and the survival strategies they apply themselves.

The interviewed families were randomly selected in small villages and towns alike, with the help of the social policy department of the municipality or the family counseling institution, which were in a direct contact with them due to counseling, to the disbursement of social aid or for any other social reason. From among the selected small towns some are located in Western, others in Eastern Hungary, there are rural agrarian centers as well as former industrial towns, and there is a small town in the vicinity of Budapest. The two research projects gave us an opportunity to compare the situation and chances of the rural and urban population, which – according to income, labor market and demographic indicators – might be considered as homogeneous. This way we may differentiate among these families, labeled as ‘disadvantaged’ and to distinguish the specificities of their problems and way-outs. We were looking for both, similarities and differences in relation to livelihood, survival strategies, to solutions to crisis situations and prospects. While we made an attempt to identify the characteristics of how disadvantaged families perceive their position, and how they try to overcome their difficulties in general, at the same time we intended to point out the differences between the specific problems and survival strategies of villagers and town-dwellers.

OUT OF THE PRIMARY LABOR MARKET, IN THE SYSTEM OF IRREGULAR EMPLOYMENT

Our series of research found that unemployment and other problems related to finding stable and continuous employment are largely determinants for the socially disadvantaged position of families. In all the interviewed families one or both parents, and frequently the grandparents and grown-up children are unemployed for a shorter or longer period of time, they are engaged in irregular employment or cease to be permanently employed due to health problems or child-raising. This group has
practically no access to the labor market; they do not find safe or permanent employment, which can be explained by the features of the economic and social transition in the nineties. This process of transition was manifest in various forms in rural and urban areas. In small villages marginalized families struggle with employment problems, which result from the changes in the ownership structure in the agrarian sector, the cessation of agricultural co-operatives and the drastic decline in agricultural employment opportunities. The insufficient and costly transport facilities of villages hinder mobility to nearby towns, while local enterprises are undercapitalized and can create only a small number of jobs. Moreover, these families do not have the required financial resources, knowledge and social capital to establish their own undertakings. All that keeps these families in long-term unemployment and in poverty. In towns and cities it was the radical decline of industrial employment opportunities in the nineties that pushed this stratum of society into long-term unemployment or irregular employment. The downturn of industrial jobs was the consequence of bankruptcy, loss-making production, economic setback, but also of restructuring due to changes in ownership or to technological development. Not even the newly created urban jobs can alleviate the grave problems related to employment. One of the reasons is that part of the new jobs do not provide employment on a permanent or firm basis, the other reason is that the education, qualifications, skills and abilities of those in disadvantaged position do not meet job requirements. Besides the low level of education, the lack of entrepreneurial knowledge and capital restricts or puts the entrepreneurial opportunities of these people at risk in urban areas as well.

The heads of the interviewed families, the parents bringing up young children belong to the new generation that has grown up since the early 90s with the phenomenon of unemployment due to social transformation and economic restructuring. They are in their twenties or thirties, a large number of them was already unemployed when they established a family, they grew up to be parents and breadwinners with no personal experience of permanent employment or job safety. In villages and towns alike, these people have access to the following types of jobs or employment: irregular employment, home-based work, casual work, public work, fixed-term contract or contract for a trial period. In some more favorable cases retraining and further training are also available for them, which improve their employment opportunities. In these families with children the parents reached adulthood in the nineties, when after leaving school, they had access only to short-term or casual work and to irregular income. Those with a longer employment relationship among them have already had some personal experience of bankruptcy, liquidation or the non-payment of wages by the employer. The majority of these young mothers cannot find re-employment at their workplaces after giving birth to a child. This holds true in rural and urban areas as well. The major obstacles they face are their low level of education, the lack of work experience, transport difficulties and costs, the lack of child-care institutions, and last but not least, the extremely hard - sometimes nearly impossible - task of reconciling work and family obligations. Any of these factors prevents young mothers from going back to work, but in some cases the listed factors add up. In most cases the only regular income of the family is family support, social benefits, social allowances. While young parents got accustomed to unemployment
and to the system of social benefits as they were growing up, their children are already born into these circumstances.

The disadvantaged social and financial position restricts the alternatives of social advancement to a large extent. The ways out of unemployment and poverty – such as mobility, family enterprise, and the schooling of children – require such a sacrifice from, which causes further difficulties and very often jeopardizes the livelihood of families. Among poor financial and material circumstances, and among the responsibilities to support the children and the elderly, to take care of the invalid members of the family any unexpected event and unforeseen cost can trigger severe disturbances in the everyday life of the family. Similar disturbances are caused by the leave of any family member who can contribute to the functioning of the family. Such a step might be made by elder, talented children who leave the family to study, or to establish their own family; one of the parents might also decide to work away from home, which is a costly solution because of the additional spending of daily or weekly commuting and ‘costly’ because of the tensions that might arise within the family. And we must not forget about divorces, which are traumatic in material, financial as well as in psychological terms. As to the choices of advancement, we met some rural and urban disadvantaged families that attempted to establish their own enterprises. These are e.g. agricultural family ventures on their own or rented plot of land, or workshops, small shops opened in the cellar, on the ground floor or in the backyard of the houses. These micro-enterprises based on the intensive labor of family members, on the savings of the family, on loans from other family members and friends are, however, rather vulnerable. A slight setback in demand on the market, disturbances in bulk-buying, changes in taxation and interest rates, the debts enterprises accumulate vis-à-vis other enterprises can make the undercapitalized micro-enterprises, which have no reserves, go bankrupt. As a result of bankruptcy, families lose their savings; they might lose their lands, houses, and thus face a dramatic, profound crisis.

**LIVING AND HOUSING CONDITIONS**

The housing and sanitary conditions of families visited and interviewed reflect very precisely their material, social and cultural disadvantages. These conditions even project the alarming prospects the members of the families, with children among them, are likely to encounter: the further deterioration of their social standing, illnesses, psychological defects. There is no significant difference between the housing conditions of villagers and those living at the outskirts of towns that resemble rural environment: most interviewed families live in detached houses of their own. These are either old houses in a bad state of repair, or they are unfinished and therefore of poor quality. The old houses were inherited by the families living in them, or were bought at a low price because of their poor quality. These houses often consist of only one room and a kitchen, rarely are there more than three rooms altogether. In very few

---

1 This topic was analysed in the UNDP-CSO Closing Report II. by Róbert Csák *Living and Housing Environment of Socially Marginalized Families* (In Simonyi 2002).
houses can we find a bathroom, but a large number of houses are damp and difficult to heat. The construction of the now unfinished houses started several years ago and was stopped at the end of the eighties. They show the efforts the families or the grandparents made to settle the housing problem of the family and their hopes to provide a comfortable place to live where every member of the family has a separate bedroom. Among the interviewed families there are a few who rent such houses in villages or at the outskirts of towns, because this is the only available, cheap solution to their housing problems. Another group of city-dwellers, who live in blocks of flats, built of concrete, pre-fabricated panels in urban environment located in neighborhoods that are known to be poor, or ‘bad’ in other terms. Some of these families live in their own flats, others live in flats owned by the municipality, and some families are lodgers. The sanitation facilities of these urban families are better even in the poor quality blocks in run-down neighborhoods than in rural areas, because in the flats there are bathrooms, toilets, and utilities. Urban emergency housing was of the poorest quality of all dwellings. These flats can be found in old tenement houses or at the outskirts of towns, in the ‘servants’ quarters’.

The flats and houses of the interviewed families were either sparsely furnished with only a few pieces of furniture, or on the contrary: full of furniture. Furniture is inherited from parents, or received from relatives, friends, and acquaintances; rarely do these families buy them themselves. Among durable consumer goods families mostly have television sets, the second most frequently possessed item is a refrigerator. These two items were found nearly in every household we visited. In the urban environment families have more household appliances and items of consumer electronics (videos, tape recorders, record players) than in the rural environment. Most families buy these on hire purchase, which is easier to do in towns, where people are more exposed to ‘commercial temptations’. A large number of rural as well as urban families possess cellular phones, which in most cases substitute traditional telephone main lines. The primary reason for this is that families want to economize on telephone bills, and if they have cellular phones with pre-paid cards they cannot spend more than they paid in advance. Besides, this way they can spare the subscription fee. In several households the telephone was cut off, or the family had it cut off, because they were in arrears with paying the bill. Concerning other utilities, we experienced the lack of gas in most cases. In villages families cannot afford to connect to the main pipeline, even if it is available in the street. Such families chose to use propane butane gas containers instead. In towns, the gas utility was not available for families who were in arrears with the payment of the gas bills.

Flats and houses are jam-packed for two reasons. They are either too small for families raising several children, or parents, children, grandparents, parents’ siblings and relatives live in the flats or houses of one, two or rarely more than two rooms. Young couples move in with their parents when they establish their own family, and the household will be increasingly extended as children are born. Other relatives also move in after they divorce or a spouse deceases, or a member of the family falls seriously ill. A simple reason for family members to move together is the need to economize on the costs of living. However, even if these costs decrease as a result of the extended family living under the same roof, conflicts, friction and tension might...
appear more frequently because of the lack of space and peace needed for learning, relaxation or just for personal intimacy.

DIVISION OF labor AND ROLES IN DISADVANTAGED FAMILIES

The jam-packed flats and houses indicate the interdependence of the members of socially disadvantaged families in the way they organize their everyday lives, and formulate strategies of survival and adaptation. Family members divide their time, energy and income coming from various sources – from wage, social assistance, pension, casual work - according to the needs arising from child-raising, household duties, work around the house and in family farm if there is one, from the requirements of their jobs, or of taking care of the invalid and the old members of the family. If one or more people in the family are unemployed, household chores and work around the house will be considered of higher value. Economical housekeeping, home-grown and home-made food, income from the small-scale domestic economy, goods and services available through the system of reciprocity and of mutual favors, the involvement of children in household chores and casual work are the results of efforts made by the family members to supplement the social benefits which they are entitled to and the means-tested social aids. Child-raising and the related obligations – supporting children’s education, organizing transport to schools farther away, financing their private extra classes and supporting their attendance of extra courses – take up a large amount of the scarce financial resources and require a lot of energy. These requirements are extremely demanding and put a strain on parents, who also have to work intensively in the household and around the house, and perform some casual work as well. However, families who are willing to make such sacrifices do so because they consider these efforts as a long-term investment. In the family division of labor small-scale family farms are of primary importance in rural areas. At the same time, families living in urban settlements often rent a plot of land to supply their households with some additional foodstuffs.

In the case of families bringing up young children in small villages women seem to be able to take up employment only on condition that a member of the family can lend a helping hand with the household duties and child-raising. This role can be played by a grandparent, an elder child, or in some cases by the unemployed husband. We experienced in several cases that it was the dismissal of the husband that forced the wife to find a job, and the husband took over the demanding responsibilities related to housekeeping and child-raising. In towns and cities the easier access to child-care institutions might facilitate the employment of women, at least in the inner districts of towns, not at the rural outskirts.

It is not only unemployment but also taking care of permanently ill members of the family or children living with disabilities that require an intensive division of labor and roles in the family. In several cases we experienced an overlap between male and

---

female roles (the hospitalization of the sick child engages the mother to such an extent that the majority of household chores and child-raising tasks are taken over by the father).

Household work and child-raising, however, are far more rewarding for many women than the low-paid jobs available for them. Usually, these jobs require a low level of qualification and are to be performed among poor working conditions. Failures, unpleasant work experience and the unsuccessful attempts at finding employment drive women back to the family, where they feel their time, energy and capacities being made a much more efficient use of. Additionally, they perhaps earn more respect. In her study, Orsoval (Simonyi 2002) comes to the conclusion that women who are reluctant to look for employment use child-raising as a psychological excuse for their reluctance. Having a positive role in the family is instrumental for them to distance themselves from their own employment-related failures and fears. For men failures in the labor market do not seem to be so easy to compensate with a more important role played in the family. Losing the role of the breadwinner men go through a serious crisis, which causes mounting tension at home. However, there were cases when women and men alike earned reputation and recognition by being involved in the life of the local community, in local NGOs and in charitable organizations. This contributed to the strengthening of the balanced family life and improved the family’s social status even in unfavorable circumstances.

Besides childcare institutions, social institutions are also more available for city-dwellers than for villagers. The interviewed urban families much more often received assistance from family counselors, from associations for large families and from the child welfare service than their counterparts living in small villages. Not only cash benefits but also benefits-in-kind were more accessible for disadvantaged urban families. The same applies to shopping discounts and services provided at a reduced price for children. The better availability of family counseling, educational guidance, helping social institutions and experts in towns mean that city-dwellers can take advantage of them much more easily than those living in small villages.

CHILDREN AND THEIR PROSPECTS IN DISADVANTAGED FAMILIES

We examined the situation of children in the visited families according to four aspects: learning opportunities and education, health, their participation in the household chores and their future prospects.

We deemed the learning opportunities of the children at disadvantaged families limited in several respects. The difficult traffic conditions – distances and costs – are often drawbacks to children already in the elementary school. Later their integration into secondary education, the selection of the school according to their abilities and expectations, commuting or – in certain cases – boarding means a further obstacle for those who wish to continue their studies. Towns and cities – in this respect – with their

---

3 See Angela Siomos: *Difficulties and Perspectives of Children in Marginalized Families* (Simonyi 2002)
more dense and differentiated school system provide more learning and career opportunities for children of socially disadvantaged families.

At the same time, the financial situation of families significantly limits the acquisition of goods – books, personal computers, instruments of music – which would contribute to the development and adequate education of talented children. Similarly, there were hardly any of the interviewed families, which could have afforded private or foreign language lessons. It was only in the case of few talented children with good school progress where parents reported about development prospects offered by the schools in the form of special afternoon courses, e.g. foreign language learning, IT technology, access to the Internet. However, we did not only experience the danger of the loss of talented children with good abilities. We can witness the lack of opportunities too for children with average or poorer school performance - who were often absent because of their illness – to catch up from a disadvantaged position at the schools located in the dwelling place of families. This is the outcome of the less developed infrastructure of small settlements as well as the practice of schools in the socially or geographically backward peripheries of towns that cannot create equal opportunities for the children of disadvantaged families since their teachers are overburdened and the facilities are poor.

We have found the health conditions of the children of disadvantaged families disastrous. Although our experiences regarding the disadvantaged families or their children are not representative, the lives of the children and their parents presented in the family case studies and in the thematic analyses bring severe problems of the health care and social system to light. Premature birth, congenital cardiac and respiratory diseases, mental and physical disabilities are real tragedies as in almost every case there was a lack of medical treatment or the unavailability of costly medication in the background. The attention, care and sacrifice of the parents are even more indispensable in the case of severely sick children of disadvantaged families as often they substitute the professional care and comfort of medical services on sale. The absence of mothers – who spend months with their sick children in hospital or at treatments - from work and from the household jeopardizes the basic pillars of family life in this social stratum. In these cases healthy children should undertake more burdens in the division of labor in the families meanwhile they receive even less attention than before, and thus their prospects further deteriorate.

The pattern of the division of labor in disadvantaged families differs from the ordinary. Children do not work in the household because it is a means to socialize or prepare them for their future duties. They work because they have to and often they do not have enough time to study. The place and role of children in the household management and income structure of the family are depending on their sex, capacities, abilities and physical condition. In these families not only the family allowances and social benefits – paid according to the number of children - but also the different seasonal or casual work of the children form the basis of the family income. It is especially typical in the villages that children pick fruits or cultivate tobacco not only in the family farm but they also work by the day, collect mushroom or forest fruit with their parents. Children in towns mainly contribute to the division of domestic labor in
the family by taking care of the younger children, the sick or the old; helping in the household and undertaking seasonal work in the summer holidays.

Concerning the future prospects and opportunities of the children we also traced differences between urban and rural families. The future employment opportunities of children in small settlements are so restricted that their parents do not think they will be able to get along at their locality either with or without proper education. For the sake of finding employment somewhere else, they usually plan to send their children to vocational training. Parents who understand the importance of further education are forced to undertake enormous financial burdens and personal efforts in their reduced circumstances. In the towns, parents are more likely to be aware of the advantages of education than in the villages as in the bigger towns more employment opportunities are visible that demand higher – or in certain cases – tertiary-level qualification. At the same time, schools are also more available, thus the division of labor in the family does not change drastically as the older children do not have to leave their home or commute to school.

The frequent fiascos at school, the alarming health conditions and the limits of the development of the capacities of these children reproduce the patterns of the parents’ way of living. The seasonal and casual work in and outside the household does not only train for work – as in families of average or higher living standards – but they also transfer the parental pattern of accommodating to the disadvantageous labor market situation. In the lack of brighter future prospects and career opportunities to be achieved through learning and following the subsistence and adaptation models of the parents, the disadvantageous social situations based on irregular work and social provisions will be reproduced in the lives of these children.

**BURDENS OF CHILD-RAISING**

Most of the interviewed families expressed their serious concerns about the problems regarding the present and future of their children. The most often mentioned difficulties and burdens of child-raising were the efforts taken by the families and parents to provide a stable emotional and psychological background, to assure the healthy development of their children amidst the mean circumstances, the daily financial uncertainties, in the situations without hope and prospects. These efforts mean intensive physical and nervous strain for the parents overburdened by precarious and casual work, an intensive division of labor in the family and the difficulty of the distribution of the irregular and uncertain income. The concern about the future of the children often generates despair and self-reproach in many parents, which is detrimental to the energy and positive image of the parent necessary for child-raising. Both in the villages and towns we have seen cases when the difficult circumstances strengthened the family bonds, but there were many cases where the everyday problems resulted in constant quarrels and tensions detrimental to the children. In this social stratum, divorces mean particularly severe financial problems; flats cannot be

---

4 See József Leiner *The Distribution of the Burdens of child-raising* (Simonyi 2002).
divided easily, single parents are quite likely to become homeless, the collection of child maintenance is problematic and the children together with their parents become defenseless in the administration of family law cases.

The uncertain situation of children is often aggravated by the efforts of the parents to establish safety, to receive stable income and to find regular employment. The frequent move from one settlement to another in the hope of a job, of a cheaper flat or lower cost of living uproot children from their accustomed environment, school, friends and family members.

Families cling to the social safety net of social allowances and benefits, as their income is inadequate due to the lack of regular work. Similarly, they also try to share the emotional and psychological burdens of child-raising primarily with the other members of the family and often with social institutions, clerical and charity organizations or with the schools. Elder siblings, grandparents, relatives often play an indispensable role when helping the children during the school year with their studies, during the summer holiday with organizing programs for them (in the case of children of disadvantaged families we can hardly speak about going on holidays) and during illnesses through caring. Non-governmental organizations, such as the association of large families or certain ecclesiastic institutions provide support to some families with organizing cultural and spare-time programs and through the moral education of the children. Though they reach only a small number of these families, we found that in some cases they strengthen with their solidarity and ethical norms the self-esteem of the children, and their respect for the efforts taken by their families and parents. Schools can support these families by contributing to certain financial burdens of education or helping children to overcome their learning difficulties. However, while meals and school equipment are subsidized by the state or the local municipalities, the overburdened teachers are rarely able to spend extra working hours dealing with children of disadvantageous families who show learning, social and emotional problems.

The types of the solidarity systems available for the parents in the case of sickness, accident, divorce, the unemployment of a further family member, the lack of the irregular income and problems with the child at school or at home are different among rural and urban families. The way in which parents can get access to these organizations depend on the family structure, the type of settlement, the local traditions and the availability of social and charity organizations. In the case of families living in the same neighborhood, the functions of support and education can more easily be overtaken by others; in the smaller settlements mutual support and solidarity systems are more frequently established than in isolated urban environment. However, in the towns these families can overcome the crisis situations with the help of the more easily available social workers, family support centers, offices of guardians and child welfare services. The necessity of joint family management of the household may further strengthen family links and rationalize the flexible division of the unexpected extra costs. We also experienced that some families could integrate into a larger community through their church, which provided them with a certain social status and support in their poverty consciously undertaken for the sake of having many children.
Childcare institutions, nurseries and kindergartens formulate a bridge between the demands of employment and child-raising especially for the mothers. However their working hours do not fit the needs of working mothers in the small settlements whose working time is longer because of commuting, while even its costs are high in relation to the wages of these mainly unskilled or semiskilled mothers. Thus in the case of employment mothers are dependent on family support or they rather decide to stay at home with their children and work in the household, the family farm or undertake casual home-based work.

THE SITUATION OF WOMEN IN DISADVANTAGED FAMILIES

In almost every visited family, the social and geographical difficulties proved to be insoluble due to the lack of adequate income because of unemployment and inactivity (and their disadvantages have been accumulated since the exclusion from the labor market). This is the reason why in almost every case the female members of the families, the mothers with children receive child-care benefit or child-raising support or they stay at home inactive as they have given up or never have tried to find a job for themselves. We also met mothers who – struggling with their health problems – receive disability pension. The household tasks and the children are in the focus of the lives of these women. Their difficulties and trials are all in relation with the organization of family life and the household, the way of living and the upbringing of their children. Their roles are traditional female roles; their successes and failures are also connected with the family life. They are successful when the family holds together, when they can make both ends meet despite the narrow means, when they are economical with the family income generated from employment and the social provisions, when the children are healthy, when the elderly are cared for and when they can support their husbands in their precarious and irregular work. At the same time, the disintegration of the family, divorce, unsolved health problems, deviancies – alcoholism, criminality, tramping – and indebtedness is failure.

The lack of employment opportunities hit hard the women both in the villages and towns and the members of these families are aware of their restricted labor market opportunities. When they calculate with the dense division of labor and time in the family, the distances, the length and costs of commuting and the low wages of the jobs available for them, they rarely decide to look for employment. However, both in the countryside and in the towns, we also experienced that women do not completely give up their bread-winning activities. Family case studies show that the female members of disadvantaged families living in villages have more chance to find casual work, work at home or in the family farm or they can breed animals. These tasks – although with enormous efforts – can somehow be adjusted to the household chores and child-raising. In the towns, we found women more prone to use external help in order to be able to provide for their families through social allowances and benefits in kind.

These women have less chance to organize their wage-earning activity besides taking care of the household and their children. Even if they sometimes have casual or illegal work – cleaning, taking care of the old and the sick – or public work, which is compulsory for the acquisition of the aid, these time-consuming tasks can only be performed away from their homes. Thus, they have to rely on childcare institutions or on the support of the family, which is again a further cost and burden for the family.

**EDUCATION AND FAMILY SUPPORT FOR BETTER EMPLOYABILITY – CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The family case studies and the analyses of the different topics have come to the conclusion that the recent, steadily disadvantageous situation of the families can be traced back to the labor market processes since social transformation and economic restructuring. Despite the decreasing unemployment figures, we should not forget that significant social groups – the young, the women, the elderly middle-aged, the Roma, those living in small settlements, the physically disabled – are disintegrated from the labor market in the long run and are in the status of inactivity or as housewives. The employment policy, the so-called active labor market means, training, job creation, the promotion of enterprises or the system of public work were not successful to reintegrate these groups into permanent employment.

These people – trying to enter the labor market without the necessary skills, working experience, market knowledge and entrepreneurial relations – who are burdened by the difficulties of founding a family and raising children fall into a ‘trap’. No good choices exist for them between the low wages of the available and often uncertain, formal and official jobs and between the irregular income from casual, precarious work supplemented with social allowances and benefits. The unstable jobs and the low wages available for them on the periphery of the labor market cannot offer them the perspective of steady development while they remain also unable to create the possibility of household management and the acquisition of extra income and savings. At the same time, they also give up – or think they have given up – the safety of raising their children at home. Thus, they think that casual, informal and seasonal employment and public work are more reconcilable with the division of labor and roles within the family, with the special saving patterns, with the burdens of child-raising and the entitlement to social benefits than formal employment. In the short run, this system seems to be more realistic and – quite paradoxically – more reliable and stable in overcoming the daily problems of living than formal and official employment with low wages and market uncertainties. For this group of people, the extra income available in occasional and informal work, the mobilization of family resources in the case of domestic and irregular work, household management based on the division of labor and time and the concentration of different earnings and social incomes might even mean the first steps – with enormous efforts and discipline – towards some sort of a family enterprise.

However, this division of labor and roles within the family and this system of the daily way of living are exposed to many dangers in the long run. Market instability, the
loss of continuous income inevitable in the case of irregular employment, health problems, tensions in the family and emotional crises often make the system collapse and jeopardize the daily conduct of life, the housing conditions and the future of the children. Emergence remains just an illusion for most of the families. While maintaining the family, this situation conserves the obstacles for most parents to break out, and in the lack of other models and real chances, it reproduces the social situation through the examples set for the children.

Thus, the recommendations of the study should aim at promoting job creation and enhancing the employability of this social stratum. There is a need of various means of increasing their rate of employment; the dissemination of special employment forms more compatible with the division of labor within these families and the promotion of their family enterprises. It is equally important to introduce a differentiated development scheme of the school and vocational school system, which could ensure that disadvantaged families and their children living in small settlements and in backward urban environment can catch up, develop their skills, abilities and utilize their capacities and talents.

With this in view both schools and families need support. Access to cheap or subsidized books, to school supplies, to language learning facilities, availability of IT at schools and the motivation of disadvantaged families with children to make use of these possibilities partly depend on financial resources. At the same time all that also requires the more intensive attention of teachers and social workers.

It is also indispensable to strengthen the social and child-care institutions, the non-governmental and charity organizations and to improve the access to these organizations at small settlements when combating the health, housing and educational problems and the related family crisis situations. In the fight against the lasting human consequences of disadvantageous social situations the strengthening of these families is a public task of the same importance as that of job creation.

REFERENCES