

# SEMIGRA

## Észak-Alföld Case Study Report

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# 1. Regional Statistical Analysis

## 1.1. The Észak-Alföld region in the European ESPON space

As the SEMIGRA project is aimed at the study of demographic issues (sex ratio, migration) taking place in the fundamentally rural and/or peripheral regions of Europe, the research antecedents of the case study on the Észak-Alföld region should also be reviewed from these perspectives.

In the three-dimensional analytical framework of the ESPON EDORA (European Development Opportunities in Rural Areas) project, known as the so-called "EDORA cube", the three NUTS-3 regions (counties) of the Észak-Alföld have been assigned three different types out of the four available non-urban categories used by the "rurality/accessibility" typology. Starting from the easternmost unit the categories assigned were „Predominantly Rural Accessible“, „Intermediate Accessible“ and „Predominantly Rural Remote“<sup>1</sup>. In contrast to this, the "Economic Restructuring" typology, relating to the Agri-Centric and Global Competition meta-narratives, puts the entire Észak-Alföld into the "Agrarian" category on the basis of the 13 indicators<sup>2</sup>. On the one hand, this places the region among the eastern and southern edges of the EU27 which have similar characteristics, and on the other hand it joins the Észak-Alföld with two additional Hungarian regions, together creating an eastern-southern boundary belt and thus dividing the country into two. Finally, according to the "Performance" typology which places the non-urban NUTS-3 regions into categories within the "accumulation-depletion" continuum on the basis of 5 indicators, the Észak-Alföld has been deemed to be "below average"<sup>3</sup>.

The ESPON DEMIFER (Demographic and Migratory Flows Affecting European Regions and Cities) project has surveyed the demographical status of NUTS-2 regions in its analysis of the demographical data corresponding to 2005 and 2001-2005. In this time period, while Europe was facing the problem of a fall in population and the substantial ageing of society, the Észak-Alföld region was among the areas which could be characterised by a rather high share of young people. But at the same time, the regions classified under the category "The Challenge of Labour Force" were experiencing a loss in population due to the scarcity of employment opportunities, both through a negative population balance and through migration. One must also note, that according to calculations taking the different migration flows and their impact into account, a vast majority of European regions will gain population as a result of migration by 2050, while the Észak-Alföld region will be one of the Eastern European regions paying for these gains (ranging from a -20% to -30% difference in population)<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Dijkstra and Poelman 2008, First ESPON 2013 Scientific Report

<sup>2</sup> Copus and Noguera 2010

<sup>3</sup> First ESPON 2013 Scientific Report

<sup>4</sup> Central European Forum for Migration and Population Research, IOM, DEMIFER 2010 in First ESPON 2013 Synthesis Report

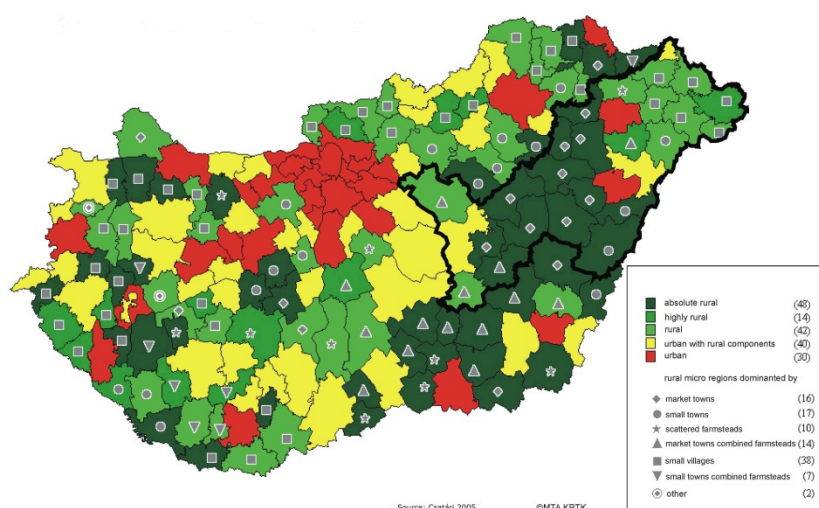
The ESPON researches have also studied the relation of economic growth, labour migration and accessibility. These studies list the Észak-Alföld among the European regions in disadvantageous situation. In part because all of its three counties are among the 37% of NUTS-3 regions which are in a double negative situation: both the GDP-PPS per capita and potential accessibility multimodal was below ESPON average in 2006. The other relation can be described by a similar double negative situation: all three counties of the Észak-Alföld are among the 20% of NUTS-3 regions facing both low accessibility (2001) and net out-migration (2001–2005)<sup>5</sup>. The SEMIGRA project employs a similar multilateral method, using the most recent data available, in order to approach the demographical issues serving as its subject-matter.

## 1.2. The Észak-Alföld region with regard to the national context

### Demographic development/Sex ratio structures

The Észak-Alföld region is ranking second by term of size, and it occupies 17,729 km<sup>2</sup>, with a population of 1,481,922 in 2010. (This is the country's second most populous region.) It is formed by three counties: Hajdú-Bihar, Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg. Municipalities (LAU 2) without an administrative status of towns make up 36% of the region's settlements, but the ratio of municipalities with less than 10,000 inhabitants is still 94%. There are 126 municipalities with populations under 1,000, the smallest of which – Nemesborzova – only has 94 permanent inhabitants. The percentage of the so called "absolutely rural" micro-regions (NUTS IV, LAU 1) in Észak-Alföld is the highest in Hungary (*Map 1*).

**Map 1 Urban-rural typology of Hungarian micro regions, 2007**



The Észak-Alföld is a region with the youngest age structure in the country. The ageing index<sup>6</sup> is 0.95 (the national index is 1.10), the ratio of working age

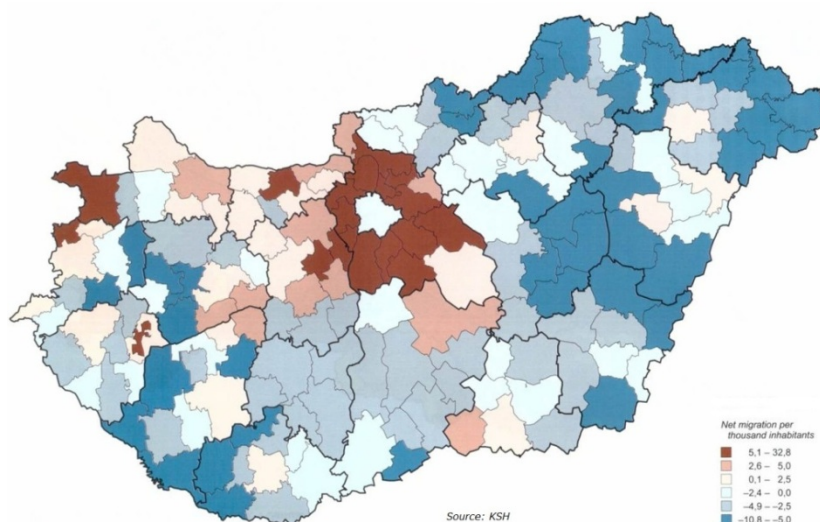
<sup>5</sup> Territorial observation No 2. 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Ageing index: the number of residents over the age of 65 divided by the number of those of under 14.

residents<sup>7</sup> in the region is 0.67. The Észak-Alföld is among the Hungarian regions with decreasing population number, and although there are regions with higher paces of decrease, the 4.9% pace of decline measured in the region is exceeding the -1.9% national average of the previous 10 years.

There are three regions in Hungary with positive net migration rates, but the subject of the present study, the Észak-Alföld region, is among the four regions with negative rates in the last decade. Moreover, the number of outmigrants was continuously increasing from 2004 up to 2007, when it reached its highest level so far. Nevertheless, the year 2008 was still the worst regarding the net migration. The average outmigration rate of the 387 settlements in the Észak-Alföld region was 5‰ in 2009 with a standard deviation of 0.016. More specifically, this is made up of a 4.61‰ outmigration rate for smaller villages (with a standard deviation of 0.016) and a 3.4‰ rate for larger settlements (with a standard deviation of 0,008). Study of settlements with less than 5,000 inhabitants suggests a logarithmic correlation between the size of municipalities and the number of outmigration, on the other hand, the number of citizens receiving unemployment benefits<sup>8</sup> leads to an exponential increase in outmigration.<sup>9</sup> Outmigration exceeds immigration in most settlements of the region but the difference between the two is slightly bigger in the case of settlements with 2,700–7,000 inhabitants. Especially because of the general trend of suburbanization in the whole country<sup>10</sup>, the internal migration of villages is also strongly influenced by their location (*Map 2*).

**Map 2 Annual average internal net migration per thousand inhabitants (2000-2010)**



Permanent internal migration corresponding to the 20-24 age group has been unequivocally dominated by women in Hungary in the past half a century. The

<sup>7</sup> Residents are considered to be working age between 15 and 65 years of age.

<sup>8</sup> It is a fixed amount unemployment benefit given for citizens who are long-term unemployed.

<sup>9</sup> The number of citizens receiving regular social security grants doubled in the region between 2000 and 2001, and continued to increase in the years to follow.

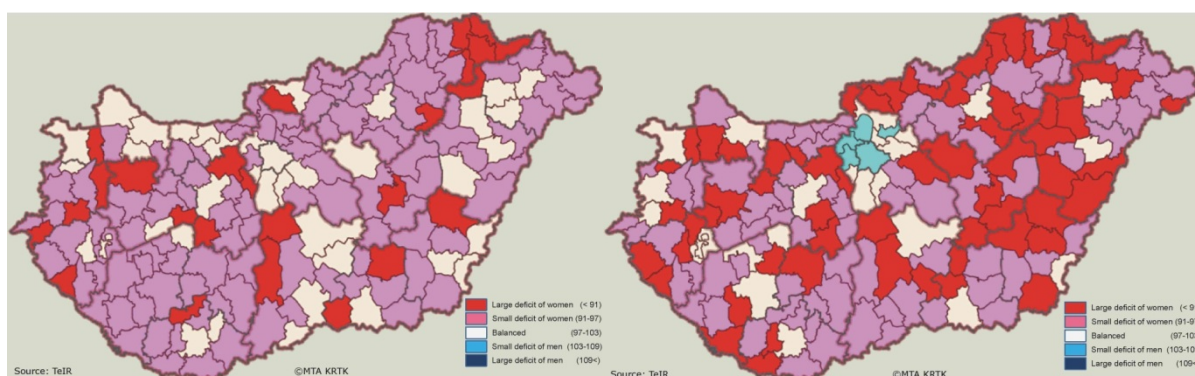
<sup>10</sup> Timár 2002



data corresponding to the 25–29 age group showed opposite results until 1990, but since then, the dominance of women gained prominence there as well. A similar change occurred in 2007 with respect to the 30–39 age group resulting in excess presence of women in permanent internal migration in this group also. Unfortunately, the statistics offer no data elaborating the difference in male and female involvement in internal migration on the regional level.

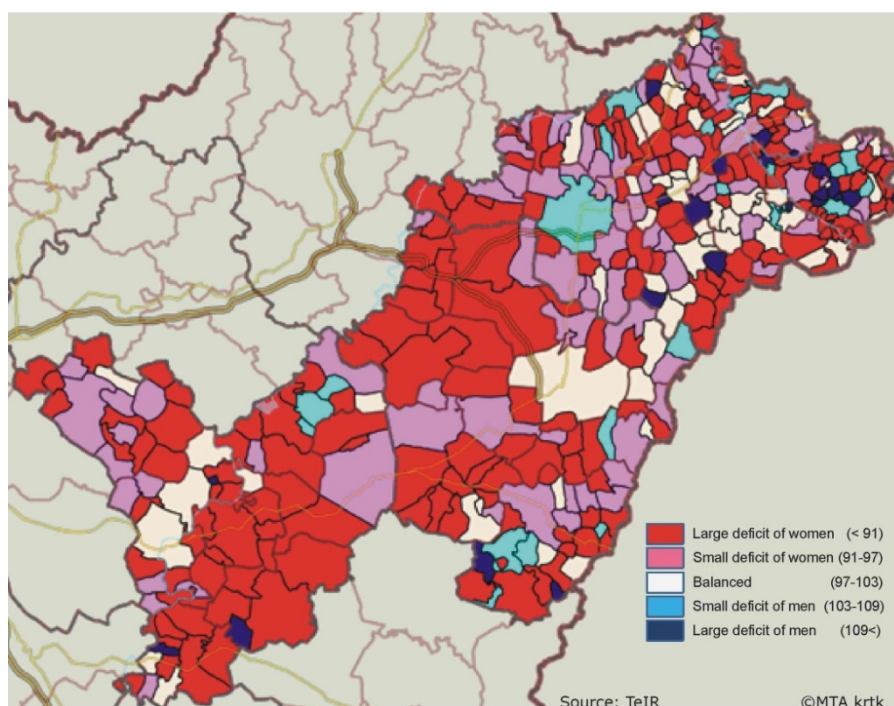
The number of permanent resident women/100 men in the age group of the 20–29 in Észak-Alföld is slightly less (95.61 in 2010) than it is at a national scale (96.18). However, the deficit of young women in the age group of the 30–39 is more pronounced (93.59) compared either to the younger age group, or to the national average (96.37). The only counterpoint in this age group (102.04) is the Central Hungary region, the most urbanised and developed area of the country (*Map 3*). Rural-urban difference is also expressed inside the Észak-Alföld region in a sense that the only category of municipalities (LAU 2) that can be characterised by a surplus of women in the age group of the 30-39 is the one with more than 50.000 inhabitants. The most pronounced deficit (78.16) is in the municipalities with less than 500 inhabitants of Hajdú-Bihar county (*Map 4, 5*).

**Map 3 Sex ratio in the 20-29 and 30-39 year age group by NUTS 4 regions in Hungary, 2010**

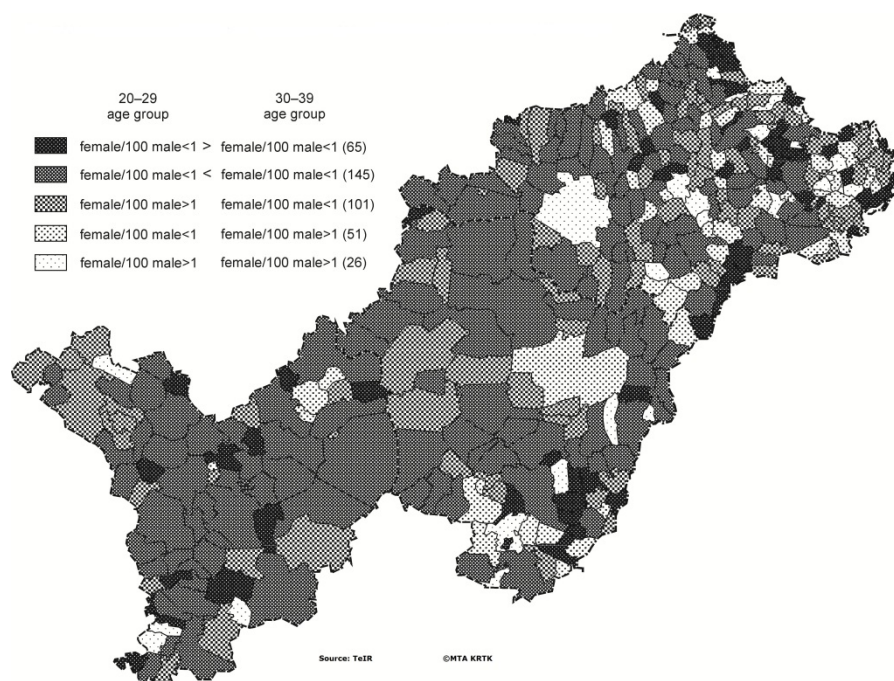


The ratio of women among the working age population of the region varies between 47% and 74% with an average ratio of 64%. 9.4% of women living in the municipalities of Észak-Alföld region are registered as unemployed (with a standard deviation of 0.033) while 45.6% of the unemployed in average are women (this rate may be as high as 64% for some areas). In the case of settlements with less than 10,000 inhabitants 7.14% of women are unemployed and 49.3% of the unemployed are women. In the region's western quarter, 5–13 out of 100 women are registered as unemployed and this figure deteriorates as one goes eastwards – with the exception of larger settlements – until it reaches the quartile of 23–46 out of 100 women.

**Map 4 Sex ratio in the 30-39 year age group by municipalities (LAU 2) in the Észak-Alföld region, 2010**



**Map 5 Sex ratio in different age groups by municipalities in the Észak-Alföld region, 2010**



In almost all of the NUTS-4 micro-regions on the outer borders of the region the ratio of working age women is significantly lower than in the more central areas or in larger towns – especially due to the high number of small villages and their characteristics.

Employment figures for women varied between 47–51% in 1998–2009 and so regularly fell behind the figures for men, which varied between 60–63%. The

ageing index for women in the region is 1.32 and the ratio of working age women is 64.2%.

### **Economic structure**

On the basis of economic indices (GDP) the Észak-Alföld region is one of the least developed regions in Hungary and also in the European Union. There are significant differences between the more developed cores of the region (the county seat Debrecen, Nyíregyháza, Szolnok and their micro-regions), the outlying areas bordering Romania and the Ukraine and the internal peripheries, which have a dramatically low potential of generating income and characterised by higher unemployment even compared to the regional average.

Beginning with the 1960s more complex forms of industrial production (chemical industry, pharmaceuticals, engineering industry and electrical engineering) appeared in the region along with agriculture and the processing industry founded on raw materials either locally extracted or imported from the Soviet Union. Local agriculture was very diverse spanning production in extensive animal husbandry, cultivation of grain and different plants for industrial use and horticulture. The apples grown in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county were one of the favourite fruits on the market in member states of the former COMECON, especially in the Soviet Union.

The economic and social transformation of 1989/90 had an unfavourable effect on the region's economy. The collapse of COMECON brought about uncertainty in marketing and sales, as well as in raw material supply which led to a serious reduction in the region's production capacities. Agriculture and processing industry were clearly adversely affected by the economic restructuring that followed 1990. Per capita foreign investment in the region is only a quarter of the national average. Domestic and foreign investors favoured the technically most developed sections of the industry (electro industry, pharmaceuticals, chemical industry). The agricultural sections of the economy registered no development or renewal partly because questions regarding quality arose, but mainly due to difficulties in marketing and sales and the decline of the local agricultural processing industry. All of these changes had an unfavourable effect on the quality of life and employment opportunities of the people living in the peripheral areas of the region.

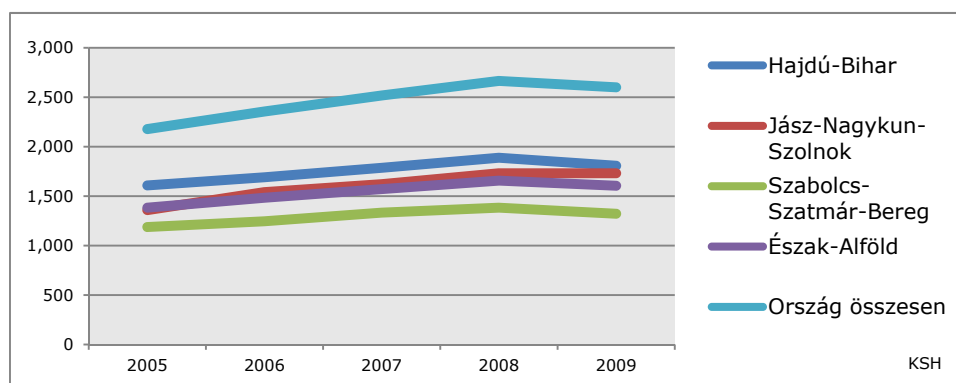
The development experienced in the service sector was also largely focused on the region's economically developed and more populous core areas. In conclusion, the two decades following 1990 aggravated the underdevelopment of the Észak-Alföld region relative to other regions of Europe on the one hand, and resulted in increasing differences between the core and peripheral areas within the region on the other<sup>11</sup>.

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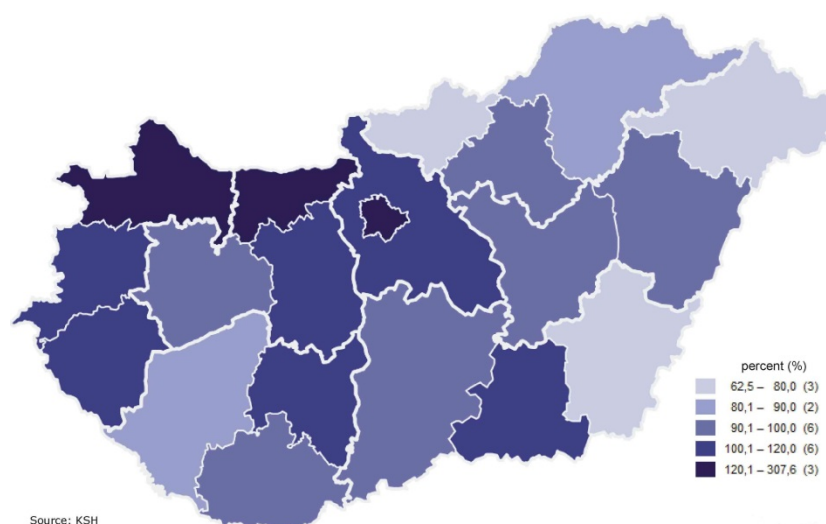
<sup>11</sup> Baranyi 2008

The region's per capita gross domestic product fell short of reaching the national level in the past years and has shown signs of further deterioration beginning with the year 2008. Of the three counties (NUTS 3) in the region, the economic indices of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg are the least favourable, and it is Hajdú-Bihar, that improves the average (*Figure 1, Map 6*).

**Figure 1 GDP/capita 1000 HUF (2005-2009)**



**Map 6 GDP/population in the percentage of average of counties in Hungary**

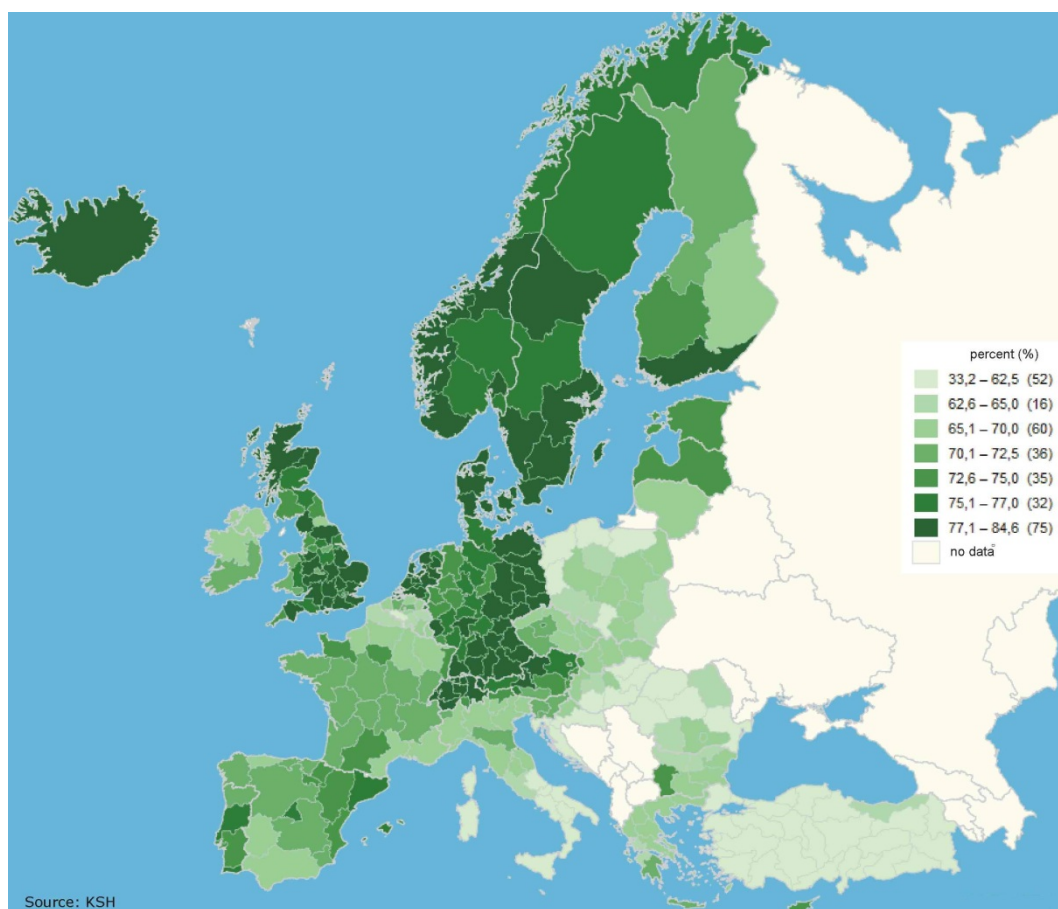


Employment figures for the active population (activity rate in the 15-64 year age group) are over 60% on a national level in 2009, but regarding the Észak-Alföld region's rates is the lowest in Hungary (around 56%), even though the steady decrease of 2006–2009 was followed by a slight improvement in 2009 (*Map 7*).

Within the region, it is Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county that continues to show the lowest employment index, as it has shown for the past 10 years. The rate of unemployment is also higher, although one has to add, that the level of unemployment has been increasing in the entire region since 2004 with only minor breaks of decrease or stagnation. The proportion of women among registered job seekers is around 45% everywhere in the region.



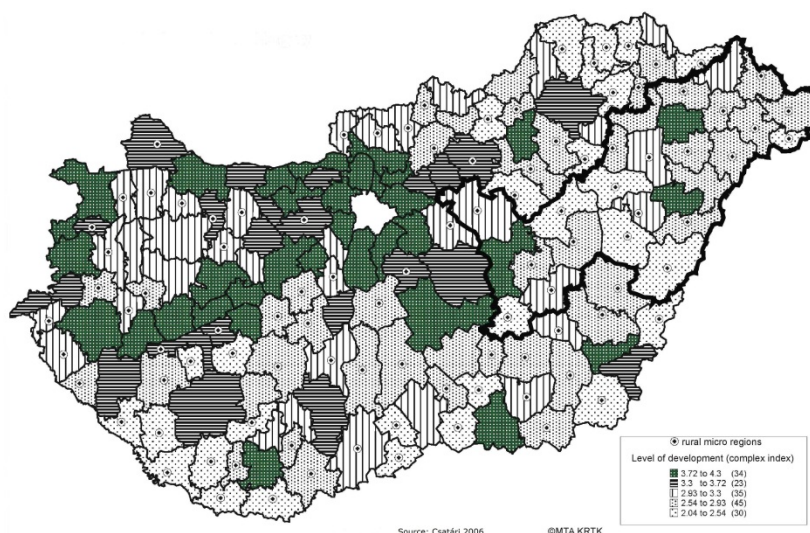
**Map 7 Activities rate by NUTS 2 regions in Europe**



### 1.3. Inner regional differences and disparities, typology by municipalities

Only the three county seats situated in the Észak-Alföld region made it among the most developed micro-regions with five other areas labelled moderately developed.

**Map 8 Rural micro regions level of development in Hungary**

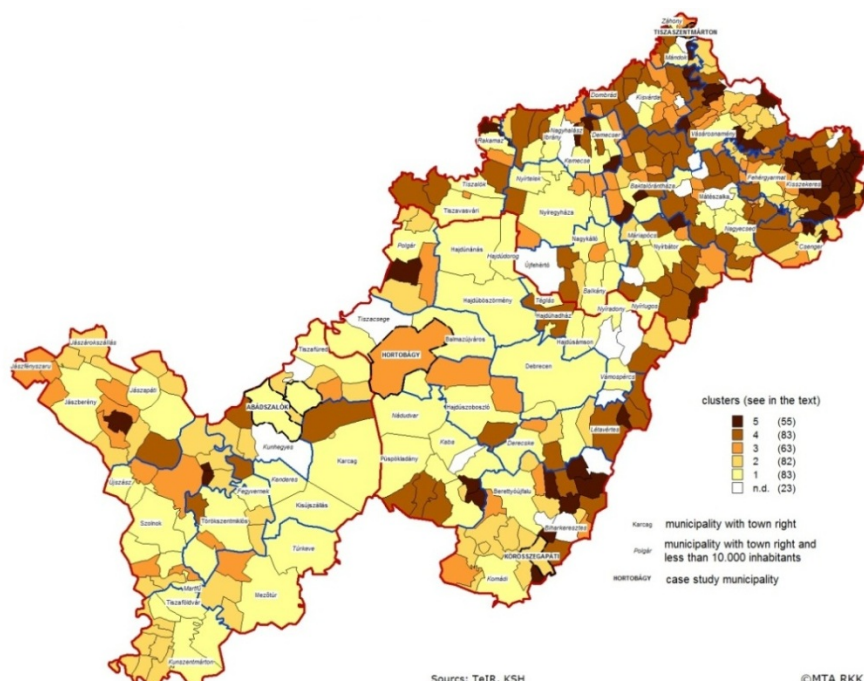


The remaining micro-regions fell into the groups of disadvantaged or severely disadvantaged areas. Therefore, on the basis of the development level of its micro-regions, the Észak-Alföld region belongs among the underdeveloped regions of the country<sup>12</sup>, although it has slightly more favourable indices than the Észak-Magyarország or Dél-Dunántúl regions (*Map 8*).

Between the variables we used in the principal component test, the data regarding unemployment, outmigration, ageing and social subsidy (i.e.: social security grants and unemployment benefits) explain 90.73% of the complete variance. The primary principal components were the educational background of the unemployed population, the number of accessible types of temporary social subsidy and the amounts offered through them and the level of outmigration with a combined 77.25% explanation of the complete variance. The ratio of women within the permanent population and within the unemployed population was considered at this level, but its explanatory strength was rather small.

The cluster analysis conducted in view of the results<sup>13</sup> of the principal component test identified five clusters. Each variable was entered into the analysis with intraregional percentile value, therefore their status may be typified as follows (*Map 9*).

**Map 9 Clusters in the Észak-Alföld region**



1. *Major settlements in Észak-Alföld.* These are larger municipalities with high ratios of women inhabitants (around 50.72%<sup>14</sup>), high ageing indices

<sup>12</sup> Csatári 2006

<sup>13</sup> The number of variables was eventually reduced from 58 to 11 – regarding communality – in the course of coding, contractions and iterations conducted in the principal component test.

<sup>14</sup> Regarding cluster centres.

and a high number of citizens registered as unemployed – relative to the regional average. (Our study identified 83 such settlements.)

2. *Ageing village communities with relatively few social difficulties.* These are villages with an ageing index of 1.17–1.4 (among women the index exceeds 1.38), where women outnumber men and make up 51.33% of inhabitants. The number of citizens who are registered as unemployed, and the number of recipients of social benefits or unemployment benefits are low. (82 settlements)
3. *Relatively "affluent", ageing village communities.* These are villages where unemployment is low and per capita income is around 469,000–498,000 HUF/year, exceeding regional average. In these communities the number of inhabitants receiving social security grants or unemployment benefits is low while the ageing index (0.8–0.95) and the ratio of working age inhabitants (66–68%) is higher. (63 settlements)
4. *Bigger villages with less women and more social difficulties.* The ratio women (50.3%) and working age inhabitants is lower in these villages, while the number of citizens receiving social security grants or unemployment benefits is high. The figure for citizens registered as unemployed is also higher, and the per capita income (335,000–400,000 HUF/year) is lower than the regional average. (83 settlements)
5. *Small villages with demographic and economic difficulties.* The ratio of citizens receiving social subsidy is lower in these villages, and the number of working age inhabitants is also less (with a ratio under 0.65), just as the ageing index (0.66). Per capita income is low (less than 350,000 HUF per annual). (55 settlements)

## 2. Online questionnaire with pupils – Focus on gender related differences in this age group

The opinion of senior secondary school students was surveyed in the Észak-Alföld region offline. Respondents were contacted in a direct manner, with the help of the institutions they attended. Groups of students filled out the questionnaires with the help of pollsters and the answers were collected on paper and then coded and recorded by experts.

**Table 1 Questionnaire data**

Institution	Settlement	Number
Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok Megyei Hámosi András Szakközépiskola és Szakiskola	Tiszafeüred	82
Verseghy Ferenc Gimnázium	Szolnok.	121
Arany János Gimnázium, Egészségügyi Szakképző, Közgazdasági Szakközépiskola és Szabó Pál Kollégium	Berettyóújfalu	154
Diószegi Sámuel Közép- és Szakképző Iskola	Debrecen	148
Lónay Menyhért Szakközép- és Szakképző Iskola	Vásárosnamény	76
Szent László Katolikus Szakközépiskola, Általános Iskola, Kollégium és Óvoda	Kisvárdá	159

When selecting the partner schools, we intended to make sure that the widest possible scope of trainings is included in the study with regard to the level and – in the case of vocational trainings – the field of the trainings. We also aspired to choose a group of institutions which mirrors the region's structure of rural secondary education by paying attention to the geographical location of schools and the size of population of the towns they are situated in (*Table 1*).

With these factors in mind, we selected institutions in six different towns to take part in the study. Among them, there were secondary grammar schools with curricula aimed at preparing students for tertiary education, specialized secondary schools offering vocational qualification or easily convertible knowledge and technical schools offering trainings for a wide range of professions. The range of schools was representative of the region with respect to geographical location and maintaining entity as well: it included institutions situated in the regional centre, in county centres, in midsized towns and in small towns and it also included institutions maintained by county municipalities, cities of county rank, townships and churches or religious organizations.

Of the total 740 questionnaires filled out by students, 61% may be considered coming from rural areas (i.e. settlements with less than 10,000 inhabitants) on the basis of the place of residence of the respondent (SD3c). 51% of respondents were girls (this figure jumps to 52.5% for students coming from rural areas) (SD1). The research recorded no internal disproportionality with regard to the financial living conditions of families (SD13-14H) and the qualification of parents (SD8-9) between male and female students or based on their place of residence.



20% of respondents mentioned that migration antecedents occurred in their lives (i.e. in the 18 years prior to the study) (SD3a-b). Almost 40% of all migration comprised of moving from villages into towns or cities. The ratio of migration from towns to nearby villages, migration from outlying villages to more favourably situated ones and migration from towns on the periphery to better situated towns is all between 17-19%. Immigration from abroad constitutes a negligible 2% of all migration, but interregional migration is also very rare (it comprises less than 5% of all migration).

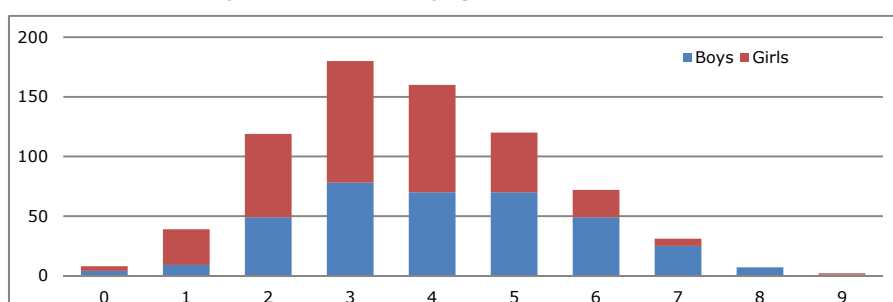
Earlier migration antecedents – i.e. interregional migration antecedents that have occurred in the life of the parents of the respondents – were mentioned by 30% of the students but only 9% of respondents claimed this to be true of both of their parents.

## 2.1. Way of life and local gender roles (Q2-11, Q16)

Most respondents picked meeting friends face to face (almost 80%) and meeting friends online as leisure activities pursued on a daily basis out of the 10 possible answers listed by the questionnaire (Q2). This is followed by 'lovely' leisure activities (DVD, TV with 60%) and helping out in the household (52%). 99% of respondents regularly do sports, but most of them do so weekly (55%) rather than daily (27%) or monthly (14%) which rarefies further in the case of shopping (daily: 5%, weekly: 30%, monthly: 60%). Interestingly enough, today there are less young people reading (and even they read more rarely than before) than going clubbing or going out for a drink with friends. It is usage of computer games, that shows patterns closest to the pattern associated with reading (daily and weekly: 15-20%, monthly: 25-35%, never: 20-25%).

There are no significant differences regarding individual leisure activities on the basis of sex or place of residence, but regarding the number of leisure activities pursued daily, boys seem to be a little more active (*Figure 2*).

**Figure 2 Number of daily activities (by gender)**



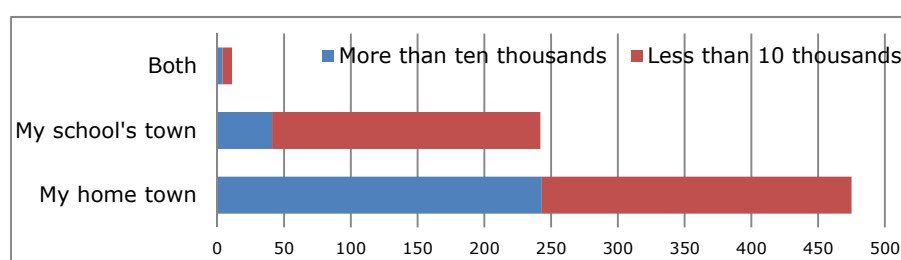
Spending leisure time in an organised fashion (i.e. being a member of a band, team or club) (Q3) is less and less typical of our times: a mere 5% of respondents belong to a team or club and only 4% mentioned that they had been members at one time in the past. Understandably it is the group of those who regularly do sports, that stands out as the most common in this sense.

The questionnaire included a section aimed at mapping the social network of respondents (Q4). It comes as no surprise, that answers to these questions show that minors consider familial relations the most important: parents, siblings and grandparents are followed by girlfriends/boyfriends and friends (mentioned by over 80% of respondents). Respondents consider relations with fellow members of organised communities (e.g.: schoolmates, teammates, members of the same club, etc.) and other relatives important too, but in these cases, a higher number of respondents used the label "important" instead of "very important" suggesting a slight weakening concerning these relations. Neighbours, online acquaintances and fellow members of sports teams or clubs constitute the next category, with 45-55% of respondents marking them as "important" or "very important".

As far as the most important relations are concerned, the data show no internal shifts in percentage points on the basis of sex or place of residence except for a slight decrease in rural respondents marking the category of "friends" important (15% in comparison with 21% in larger towns and cities). This shift probably indicates that integration into the peer group is somewhat more difficult in villages and rural areas.

The same phenomenon seems to be true concerning the importance of schoolmates. Over 20% of girls marked this group "not at all important", compared with a mere 12% of boys. This discrepancy indirectly shows the different levels of importance boys and girls attach to less tight relationships. To summarize and simplify this phenomenon, one can say, that girls are more likely to establish tight friendships with peers, while boys have a greater number of peer relationships which are often rather superficial.

**Figure 3 Which place do you meet with your friends? (by measure of hometown)**



Neither the place of meetings nor the place of residence plays a significant role in maintaining relations with friends or members of the peer group (Q5). The results of the questionnaire study are clearly contrary to the often voiced presumption that relationships established in the town of the institution attended by commuting students and students living in dormitories eventually substitute the network of relations of the locality they are originally from (*Figure 3*).

Use of the internet and social networks became the prominent means of gathering information and maintaining relations for the younger generation

(Q6). 85% of respondents use the internet multiple times a day, and another 8% go online more than once a week, which indicates that internet access is available to the youth irrespective of gender, residence or financial situation and the differences in utilization are due to personal intent rather than disparity in opportunities. In contrast with this, visits to the capital and trips abroad – or lack thereof – clearly show differences in financial living conditions (Q7). Around 24% of respondents of both sexes have never visited the capital, which is a very high ratio considering the discount fares available to students and that school trips are commonplace. The proportion of boys is somewhat higher among respondents who have never been abroad (53% and 46%). The majority of foreign trips are organized on the family level: only 5% of respondents reported trips organized by friends and another 5% listed other communities (schools, sports teams, culture clubs). On the other hand, 65% of respondents mentioned the role of such communities with respect to visits to the capital.

Based on the answers of respondents from rural areas, it seems certain that the original network of relations continue to be important at least up to the graduation from secondary school. It is also apparent from the answers, that neither social relations, nor spending leisure time depend on venues only accessible in cities or larger towns, which supports our findings elaborated above. Moreover, these special venues (e.g.: discos, youth centres, leisure centres etc.) are rather used on a monthly basis by city-dwellers as well.

Around 68% of respondents identify with the prevailing opinions and views of their place of residence suggesting a high level of integration in these communities surmounting generational differences and cultural differences resulting from them (Q9). The 2/3 general ratio of conformity only falls down to a 1/3 ratio in the case of computer games and political views, but stays above 60% even when the topic is one's general attitude towards life. There is a significant discrepancy (10%) between the sexes regarding deviation from prevailing political views which eventually means that the highest ratio of nonconformity is measured in the case of the political views of girls (almost 70%).

To conclude the group of questions on the topic of organising everyday life – and to summarize them – we added a question (Q10) that tested the attitudes of respondents using a set of statements (Q10). We inserted a few statements into this set which indirectly aimed to measure whether respondents were satisfied with their place of residence or not. Answers to these questions show a significantly higher dispersion than the answers given to questions regarding social relations or community connections. The statement "I think it would be very difficult for me to settle down elsewhere" received the lowest count (36%), which testifies to an openness to change place of residence and proves that only 1/3 of the respondents are 'bound to the soil' at the age they are leaving secondary school. Attachment to the place of residence characterizes a higher

ratio of boys than girls (40% compared to 31%). The difference between the same ratios corresponding to respondents from rural areas and respondents from cities or larger towns fades in comparison (34% compared to 38%).

The distance between the answers of the different sexes regarding the statement "I would very much like to live in a big city" is even greater. 86% of girls (compared with only 47% of boys) agreed or fully agreed with this statement, while only 10% of them opposed it firmly (compared to 25% of boys fully disagreeing with the statement). The difference between the same ratios corresponding to respondents from rural areas and respondents from cities or larger towns is once again smaller than the difference between the answers of respondents of the different sexes: 54% of respondents from rural areas and 66% of city-dwellers marked the answer "agree" while 20% and 13% respectively said "fully disagree".

In spite of the findings elaborated above,  $\frac{3}{4}$  of respondents "agreed" or "fully agreed" that "it is very nice" to live in their places of residence, which shows their strong emotional attachment to their home towns especially because differences between the answers based on the sex or place of residence of respondents were significantly smaller regarding this question. The differences between the percentage points corresponding to boys and girls support our conjecture that non-conformity among girls exceeds that among boys. As mentioned above, boys seem more likely to identify with the prevailing views of their local communities.

There are striking differences between respondents of different sex regarding interest in politics (Q11). Boys are significantly more interested (with 46% somewhat and very interested in contrast to the 30% of girls). Although the small sample size permits no conclusive statement, it is worth noting, that only 8 female respondents declared interest in politics compared to 47 male respondents (13%). Even though the survey contained no question to this effect, this strong interest may indicate a more active relation to political issues and considering the masculine nature of politics it may also provide career bases. Charitable, environmental and animal protection activity in contrast characterizes girls more: more than 70% of girls showed interest opposed to 46% of boys. The data shows no disparity based on sex or residence regarding susceptibility to municipality matters: about 50% of respondents were responsive to these issues. At the same time the majority of respondents shared the opinion that decision-makers only rarely or never consider the issues from the viewpoint of younger generations (63%), and an additional 30% believed that this only happens sometimes, substantially less often than it should. Respondents proved more critical towards the typically smaller municipalities of their residence and considered the decision-makers of the urban municipalities of their schools more sensitive to youth issues presumably due to the decisions and activity that education policy requires of settlements that actually have

institutions of secondary education<sup>15</sup>. This is reflected by the higher ratio of respondents saying decision-makers always (+5%) or at least sometimes (+8%) consider the viewpoint of younger generations.

The questionnaire specifically inquired into the difference in social expectations towards boys and girls (Q16). The distribution of answers to the majority of questions shows no disparity on the basis of sex or residence, the ratio of respondents who "fully agree" or "fully disagree" is around 12-18% and the ratio of those who "agree" or "disagree" is also relatively even. There is however a distinct difference between the answers of male and female respondents regarding the question "Girls are here much more expected to help at home than boys." while 90% of girls "fully agree" or "agree" with the statement, this ratio is only 60% among boys. Answers to the question "When you are a girl, local people judge and assess your behaviour much stronger than when you are a boy." also suggest that girls find their situation more difficult; more than 80% of them agreed with the statement while boys assumed a neutral position. The answers of male respondents also suggest a balanced structure of opinion regarding job opportunities, while 66% of female respondents indicated perception of gender inequality regarding the issue of employment.

Respondents of both sexes dismissed the assumption that local clubs and organizations had a preference for boys as well as the assumption that girls had more favourable future perspectives.

Small but tendential internal switches in the ratio of respondents picking one answer over another suggest that girls are more sensitive to gender inequality. Fewer girls (-10%) identified with the statement "It is better for the girls because it is a safe and protected environment" which does not point to a lack of security, but supports the higher ratio of girls dismissing the assumption that "Protected environments are more important for girls" and thus it may be interpreted as a firm and widespread emancipatory effort.

## **2.2. Intentions to migrate, migration and social networks (Q17, Q23-24)**

About half of the contacted young respondents were directly affected by migration because their friends, relatives or acquaintances moved away (Q17), this however did not result in ending previously intensive relations in the case of the overwhelming majority of respondents (90%), because occasional personal meetings (35%) and tools of information technology allowed them to continue caring for these connections on a daily basis.

According to common belief, attendance of institutions situated in different settlements has an important influence on migration decisions. The results of our study did not validate this hypothesis for the case of secondary schools and

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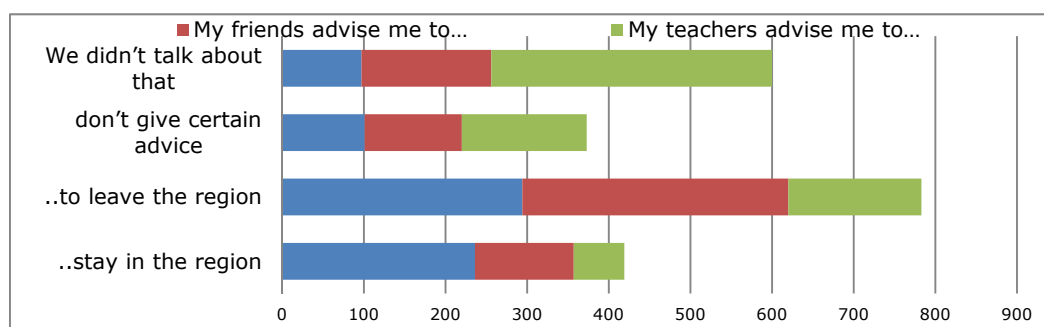
<sup>15</sup> Velkey, 2010

secondary school students. The questionnaire also touched on the expectations respondents had for the time following their graduation and it included a question asking whether they planned to stay or leave their place of residence. (Q23). Answers spread out relatively evenly, but one must note, that this question produced the highest number (23%) of respondents marking “I don’t know” as their answer. These answers may be interpreted as signs of uncertainty and seem to characterize girls a bit more than boys.

The largest group of respondents (27%) would prefer to stay in their home village or town, they are followed by those who would prefer to leave their settlement, but not the region (20%). The ratio of respondents who professed will to leave their place of residence for areas further away in Hungary (in decreasing order of utterances: Budapest, the economically developed larger towns/cities of Transdanubia, other settlements in the central region and other large towns in the country) or abroad is roughly the same and only slightly lower than the ratios previously mentioned (16%). There is no difference between girls and boys concerning the order of mentions, but the corresponding internal ratios differ significantly. Answers show once again, that boys seem to be more strongly attached to their environment (settlement, nearby area) As opposed to 18% of girls, 35% of boys plan to stay in their home towns, and in addition to this, the ratio of girls planning to leave the region is also 5% higher.

This discrepancy between the strength of attachment of boys and girls also shows in the data obtained regarding the ratios corresponding to the number of male and female respondents who render their future return to their home town likely (less than 25% of girls compared to over 40% of boys)<sup>16</sup>.

**Figure 4 What do your parents, friends and teachers mainly advise you to do after finishing the school?**



Regarding the sources of proposals concerning the future choice of place of residence (Q24) there is little difference between the answers given by male and female respondents. Only the number of boys marking the answer „We didn’t talk about that” shows a significantly higher prevalence in comparison with girls (+7%). It comes as no surprise that a higher percentage point of parents give advices to stay than friends or teachers, but even in their case, those suggesting that respondents should leave their home towns are the majority (*Figure 4*).

<sup>16</sup> Juhász, 2006

### 2.3. Future plans/Expectations (Q18-21, 22)

The section of the questionnaire aimed at inquiry into the future plans and expectations of respondents begins with questions regarding general aims and then goes to the more concrete ones (Q18b). Most respondents emphasized the importance of a happy family and a successful vocational career providing steady living (*Figure 5*). Comparing the answers of male and female respondents, one should note, that +5-10% of girls considered aims regarding family more important and they also valued aims regarding vocational career at a higher rate than boys (+8%), while boys seemed to emphasize the aims with direct financial connotations exceeding the ratios corresponding to girls by roughly the same measure.

Around 2/3 of respondents plan to continue their education after finishing their studies in the institutions they currently attend (Q19). There is no difference between the data corresponding to rural areas and larger towns or cities. A significantly higher ratio of girls professed intentions to continue education at the next level (72% compared to 65% of boys)<sup>17</sup>. At the same time boys are somewhat more likely to start businesses (Q20) (64% compared to 55% of girls) and the difference grows even greater regarding respondents with concrete entrepreneurial ideas (28% compared to 17% of girls).

**Figure 5 What do you want to have achieved in 10 years from now?**



The questionnaire contained an open question inquiring into the young respondents' plans and dreams for the future (Q22, "What would you prefer most after having finished school? Do you have a certain dream?"). About 2/3 of respondents gave admissible answers, but only 1/3 of these contained specific plans or prospects going into detail (170 respondents, 22%). The concrete element in these was mostly of spatial nature (82 respondents), the data is

<sup>17</sup> This is demonstrated by other research, for example Velkey 2009.

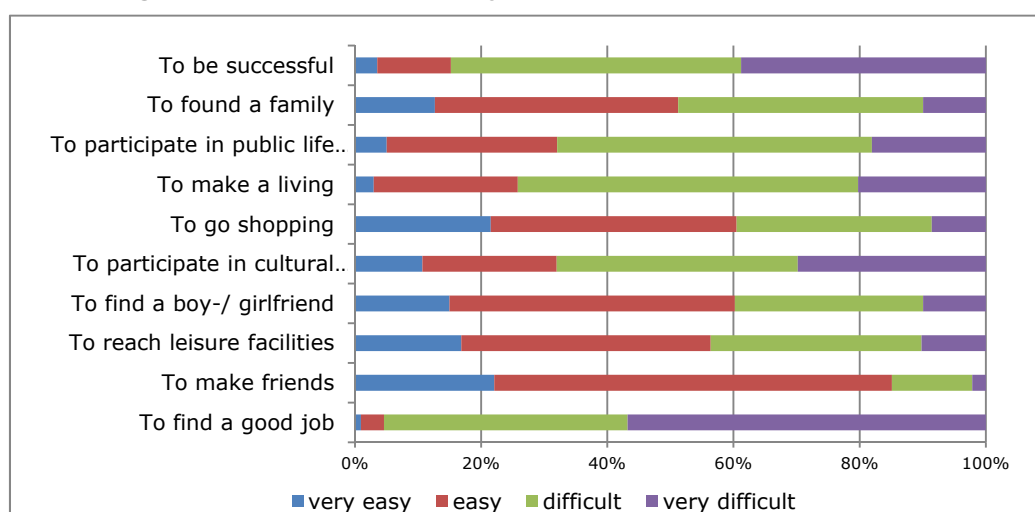
dominated by answers citing working abroad either permanently (33 respondents) or temporarily, but for extended duration. 58 respondents identified a specific job type as their aim with boys characteristically marking the so-called uniform jobs and girls picking careers related to the beauty industry. Taking over the family business only appeared in 16 cases. 30 respondents cited the pursuit of some kind of hobby (almost exclusively sports or arts) as their aim. General ideas and expectations on future prospects centered around family, career and achieving financial security.

## 2.4. Evaluation of the local living situation (Q11e, Q13-15)

In order to be able to better understand the background of the widely present intention to outmigrate among respondents, we decided to include a section in the questionnaire aimed at surveying the opportunities available to the youth in these localities (i.e. their home towns or villages – *Figure 6*).

Male and female respondents alike considered the prospects of employment and leading a successful life hopeless. The opinions of respondents from rural areas were significantly more pessimistic than the answers of respondents from cities or larger towns with regard to both employment and success<sup>18</sup>. The situation is considered problematic by both groups, but almost 2/3 of rural respondents marked the answer “very difficult” compared to less than 1/2 of city-dwellers. Respondents were very critical of cultural and entertainment prospects and shopping facilities alike, just as of opportunities to participate in different programs and events with respondents living in rural areas once again considering their situation more difficult.

**Figure 6 How difficult or how easy are the following things for young people living in the same place as you**



The significant difference evident from the data between the outmigration incentives corresponding to male and female respondents can be traced back to the very low performance of rural areas regarding the factors considered most

<sup>18</sup> Laki 2005



important in shaping young women's expectations of their future by the general public, i.e. services essential for families and career opportunities.

The findings concerning attachment to settlements and local opportunities were confirmed by young respondents during the evaluation of complex statements on local possibilities of earning a livelihood. Responses to the positively worded statements suggest a more critical, although still supportive, attitude on the part of girls as the ratio of dismissive answers given by them is 8-12% higher. The difference becomes more distinct regarding the statements in the questionnaire that voice criticism. 90% of respondents agreed with the statements "There should be more possibilities for youth to spend free time here" and "I don't like that the people here are gossiping so much", but the ratio of girls who fully agreed with them exceeded the corresponding data for boys by 10-15%. The respondents' strong attachment to localities is once again apparent: 80% consider their settlement to be their home and only 25% believe they are looked down upon because of their place of residence but at the same time 77% are afraid that they will not be able to find employment in their hometowns. The sharpest differences between supportive (agree, fully disagree) and dismissive (disagree, fully disagree) answers pertained to the statement "If you want to make more of your life, you have to leave" Male and female respondents alike considered the issue difficult, but only 48% of boys voiced full agreement with an additional 28% saying they agreed. The corresponding ratios of girls were 58% and 30% respectively showing a 15% lower rejection on their part for the general sentiment supporting outmigration.

## **2.5. Conclusions for policy recommendations**

- 20% of respondents mentioned that *migration antecedents* occurred in their lives. *Almost 40% of all migration comprised of moving from villages into towns/cities.* Immigration from abroad constitutes a negligible 2% of all migration, but interregional migration is also very rare. Earlier migration antecedents – i.e. interregional migration antecedents that have occurred in the life of the parents of the respondents – were mentioned by 30%.
- The same phenomenon seems to be true concerning the importance of schoolmates. Over 20% of girls marked this group "not at all important", compared with a mere 12% of boys. This discrepancy indirectly shows the different levels of importance boys and girls attach to less tight relationships. To summarize and simplify this phenomenon, one can say, that *girls are more likely to establish tight friendships with peers, while boys have a greater number of peer relationships, which are often rather superficial.*
- The results of the questionnaire study are clearly contrary to the often voiced presumption that relationships established in the town of the institution attended by commuting students and students living in dormitories eventually substitute the network of relations of the locality they

are originally from. *Based on the answers of respondents from rural areas, it seems certain that the original network of relations continue to be important at least up to the graduation from secondary school.*

- Neither social relations, nor spending leisure time depend on venues only accessible in larger towns/cities. Moreover, these special venues (e.g.: discos, youth centres, leisure centres etc.) are rather used on a monthly basis by town-dwellers as well.
- *Boys seem to be more strongly attached to their settlement/nearby area.* As opposed to 18% of girls, 35% of boys plan to stay in their home towns, and in addition to this, the ratio of girls planning to leave the region is also 5% higher. This discrepancy between the strength of attachment of boys and girls also shows in the data obtained regarding the ratios corresponding to the number of male and female respondents who render their future return to their home town likely (less than 25% of girls compared to over 40% of boys).
- Around 2/3 of respondents plan to continue their education after finishing their studies in the institutions they currently attend. There is no difference between the data corresponding to rural areas and larger towns or cities. *A significantly higher ratio of girls professed intentions to continue education at the next level (72% compared to 65% of boys).* At the same time *boys are somewhat more likely to start businesses (64% compared to 55% of girls)* and the difference grows even greater regarding respondents with concrete entrepreneurial ideas (28% compared to 17% of girls).
- Young respondents are explicitly critical of national and municipality level politics and believe that their issues – and they themselves – are not considered important enough by decision-makers to matter. This strengthens the sentiment of defencelessness on their part and eventually may weaken their attachment to their hometowns.

### 3. Expert Interviews

#### 3.1 Targeted experts and concept of the regional workshop

Considering on the one hand, that occasions for migration decision making arise in Hungary in the context of whether to leave a settlement/municipality or to remain permanent resident therein, and considering on the other hand, that the study of the deficit of young women was chiefly conducted with a close regard to rural spaces, we decided to pick the interviewees from 4 rural municipalities (LAU 2 scale case study settlements) in order to provide for the most thorough research of the social and economic context of migration decisions.

These 4 settlements were Abádszalók (with 4508 inhabitants in 2010) in Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok county, Hortobágy (1564 inhabitants) and Körösszegapáti (1022 inhabitants) in Hajdú-Bihar county and Tiszaszentmárton (1233 inhabitants) in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county (see Figure 6). Even though Abádszalók is a municipality with town status, it ranks among rural settlements according to EU categorization on the basis of its population number (as well as on grounds of the services available). Each of these settlements experienced a significant decrease in permanent residents (the extent of decrease since 2000 varies between 4.04% in Körösszegapáti and 9.68% in Abádszalók). Decreasing population, however is not peculiar to them only, but also true for their micro-region centres, which have populations below 20,000 inhabitants and so count among small towns even according to Hungarian terminology. Outmigration rates are especially high in Hortobágy and Tiszaszentmárton. Our primary objective was to get to the core of the problem of female deficit apparent in the younger age segments in all of these settlements, but the demographic differences seemed suitable for the review of regional variety, but also for controlling similarities. In Tiszaszentmárton and Körösszegapáti the deficit of young women is more significant in the 20–29 age group, and in the case of the latter municipality, the ratio (71 women for 100 men) is almost on par with the sex ratio of the tiny villages of the region. Hortobágy and Abádszalók are good examples of localities where the age bracket most significantly touched by the deficit of young women is the group 30–39, this shift is a phenomenon characteristic of the Észak-Alföld region in general. In the case of Hortobágy this sudden shift is accentuated by the slight surplus of women in the age brackets immediately below (only 81 women for 100 men in the age group 30–39: Map 4).

The places picked for the case study offer an insight into the life of the many villages situated in the extensive area of the Észak-Alföld region alongside the national border. Tiszaszentmárton is on the external (Ukrainian), while Körösszegapáti is on the internal (Romanian) border of the European Union, and therefore both are situated in areas which underwent different geopolitical changes after 1989. Abádszalók is one of the settlements situated alongside

county borders, fast becoming internal peripheries. Hortobágy has not benefitted from the positive effects of suburbanization despite its relative proximity to the regional centre Debrecen (38 kilometres) (other than Hortobágy, only Körösszegapáti has a city with over 200,000 inhabitants in its vicinity, but in that case it is the Romanian town of Oradea). These settlements together provide good example of the characteristics and consequences of settlement network and structure in the Észak-Alföld region: the advantages and disadvantages in organising public services for relatively big settlements far from each other; the lack of medium size towns in areas dotted with tiny villages; and the difficulties in servicing scattered farmstead settlements and former premises and residential estates of socialist co-operative farms and state farms. During the state socialist era, these settlements were partly on different paths of economic development (along with the overwhelming importance of agriculture – especially in Hortobágy and Körösszegapáti – Tiszaszentmárton managed to get engaged in international trade, processing industry, and freight traffic thanks to the railway centre in the nearby town of Záhony; Abádszalók benefitted from a growing tourism industry following the completion of the Tisza-lake project; and Hortobágy tapped into the revenues of tourism brought on by nature protection following the creation of a national park). The effects of the many new challenges that faced the communities of the Észak-Alföld region due to the economic recession of the post-socialist era including the privatization of agriculture and the sharp decline in trade with the Soviet Union can also be investigated in the case study municipalities. Falling under different ethnographical sub-regions may diversely influence the traditions of local society of these settlements. In addition to this, Körösszegapáti is home to a significant Romanian community, in Tiszaszentmárton the ratio of Gypsy inhabitants reaches 40% and in Hortobágy a commune of young families were brought to the area by the employment opportunities that arose after the creation of the state farm in 1950. These factors provide us not only with information on the specific conditions of these certain settlements, but they also offer an opportunity to draw conclusions that may then be applied to the societal conditions of a number of other small towns and villages in the Észak-Alföld region generally. The questioned interviewees helped us uncover certain trends and mechanisms whose knowledge contributes significantly to the basic proposition and task of the SEMIGRA project.

The experts asked to participate in the interview were the mayors, the local leaders most familiar with the problems of municipalities and micro-regions; municipality officials in charge of social benefits, registration of migration and communal labour projects; principals of village elementary schools and small town secondary schools who are probably the best-informed about the plans, motivation and background of migration decisions of former and present young generations; authorities familiar with certain aspects or strata of village society e.g. local heads of Gypsy minority self-government; caretakers of scattered

farmstead settlements, employees working at local internet and multimedia access points (telehouses); and economic actors, i.e. employers from the private and the public sector and a representative of a county level chamber of commerce and industry (Table 2).

**Table 2 Expert interviewees**

Interviewed experts	Occupation	Age	Municipality
Mrs Bánfi Zsuzsa	Official in charge of guardianship	35	Abádszalók
Mrs Gyöngyi Józsefné	Official in charge of recording residents, migrants	50	Körösszegapáti
Mr Kovács Mihály	Mayor	36	Abádszalók
Mr Mikola Károly	Deputy manager-general	53	Hortobágy
Mr Nagy József	Agrarian entrepreneur	63	Abádszalók
Mr Nemes Béla	Caretaker of scattered farmstead settlements	53	Hortobágy
Mr Papp Imre	President of Gypsy minority self-government	45	Tiszaszentmárton
Mrs Szabó Sándorné	Official in charge of recording residents, migrants	53	Hortobágy
Mr Szűcs Dezső	Mayor	58	Tiszaszentmárton
Mr Tarsoly Attila	Mayor	32	Körösszegapáti
Ms Tóth Henrietta	Official in charge of communal labour and "telehouse"	27	Tiszaszentmárton
Ms Vad Erzsébet	Head of elementary school	53	Körösszegapáti
Mr Varga András	Principal of secondary school	58	Tiszafüred
Mrs Vincze Andrásné	Mayor	52	Hortobágy
Ms Vincze Emese	Official in the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county	39	Nyíregyháza

Besides the individual expert interviews we had the opportunity to gather valuable information from experts especially familiar with the Észak-Alföld region at two events.

- We received an invitation to participate at an event in Debrecen organized by the "Mobility Észak-Alföld Regional Youth Service Agency" and the "Association for Students and Civilians" with the title "Situations" held on the 8<sup>th</sup> of December 2011, where 72 specialists (29 men, 43 women) representing 46 non-governmental organizations, talked about the region's youth covering the topics of outmigration, voluntary work and the development strategy for their future. The findings of the SEMIGRA research provided initial basis for the discussion. In addition to supporting the arguments with a data basis, the project could also benefit from the experiences and development proposals of the represented non-governmental organizations dealing with youth issues (among other subjects).
- The other event was a regional workshop organized in the framework of our project in cooperation with the Észak-Alföld Regional Development Agency on the 24<sup>th</sup> of January 2012. Participants included – among the associates of the agency working in different areas – a specialist of female entrepreneurship, representatives of NGOs, a member of staff at a micro-

regional association, a sociologist and an agriculture expert of a university; a representative of a county chamber of industry and commerce, a mayor, a president of a gypsy minority self-government, and a secondary school headmaster interviewed in the earlier stage of the research (*Table 3*). The workshop began with the presentation and discussion of the results of our research (situation analysis) then each participant evaluated the SWOT analysis we proposed offering their personal input proposals which we debated together once again. Finally, three teams were created corresponding to objectives on the local, regional and national level in order to discuss the development proposals of the participants followed by a collective discussion of the recommendations shared by the teams. (Part of the situation analysis is elaborated later in this chapter, while the SWOT analysis and the development proposals are included in the next chapters.)

**Table 3 Experts participated at the regional workshop**

Interviewed experts	Occupation	Municipality
Ms Fényes Hajnalka	Sociologist, University of Debrecen	Debrecen
Mrs Katonáné Kovács Judit	Agricultural engineer	Debrecen
Ms Katona Mária	Office manager of the Mobility Észak-Alföld Regional Youth Service Agency	Debrecen
Ms Grecula Enikő	Student, University of Debrecen	Debrecen
Ms Vince Emese	Official in the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County	Nyíregyháza
Mrs Bogdándiné Zsiros Márta	Official of the INTERIM-CARE Ltd	Debrecen
Ms Dányi Olga	Jászság Multi-purpose Microregional Association	Jászberény
Mr Szűcs Dezső	Mayor	Tiszaszentmárton
Mr Papp Imre	President of Gypsy minority self-government	Tiszaszentmárton
Ms Balázs Eszter	Head of the Unit of International Affairs, Észak-Alföld Regional Development Agency	Debrecen
Mr Dorogi Zoltán	Project manager, Észak-Alföld Regional Development Agency	Debrecen
Mr Balogh Zoltán	Regional representative Brussels, Észak-Alföld Regional Development Agency	Debrecen

### **3.2 Main Results of interviews and regional workshops with regard to specific needs of young women (and men)**

One of the most important lessons drawn from expert interviews was the understanding that none of the interviewees considered the possible consequences of the unbalanced sex ratio and the deficit of females among youths so far. They have no knowledge of discourse of any level on the topic and the phenomenon is generally out of their sight and perception. It was questioned at the workshop whether the higher outmigration rate of young women really mattered when the problem demanding urgent intervention was caused by the generally high outmigration rate of the youth. One of the answers offered by an expert was emphasizing a major aspect of the consequences of an imbalanced sex ratio, commenting that women play a stronger role in community

preservation and therefore a settlement with sex imbalance will also experience a lack of balance in its development.

Interviewed municipality officials working with migration records agree with our hypothesis that the excess of the deficit of women in the 30–39 age group compared to the 20–29 age group is largely due to an 'administrative glitch': the post-socialist liberalization of the ways to change one's official place of residence was presumably conducive to the emergence of a practice to register these changes with years of delay compared to the actual act of leaving one's parents. Staying with parents 'on paper' offers certain advantages (for youths e.g. leaving some of the financial burden /bills/ with parents and for the family e.g. better access to some social benefits), while the main incentives to make the change one's official place of residence registered only come when these young adults eventually buy their own real-estate, start a family and have their own children or maybe when they first intend to apply for social benefits or loans on their own right.

Respondents suppose selective migration is behind the unbalanced sex ratio too, but they believe that outmigration is essentially shaped by the labour market (as opposed to marriage or further education – the latter only influences the phenomenon in an indirect way and first and foremost affects citizens with university degrees). Taking everything into account, they consider the lack of employment opportunities to be the defining push factor of rural settlements for men and women and young and old alike. They cite historical and structural reasons like the privatization of the local or nearby socialist co-operative farms or state farms and the lack of big employers (which do not even necessarily end up providing jobs for local residents as indicated by the example of the big state companies in Hortobágy) as explanation. The severity they attach to the problem of high unemployment takes all emphasis off the question of gender differences. One of our interviewees, an agricultural entrepreneur with a large number of employees working at his business, acknowledges the absence of female employment opportunities in his company but considers its reason to be in the nature of the work. One of the mayors believed that the reason explaining the higher ratio of male stayers is that they find the prospect of staying with parents and gradually taking over the management of small family farms relatively more attractive. Although self-employment is considered an accessible survival strategy by many, an interviewee voiced opinion that women lack the ambition and self-confidence needed for starting a business. According to our expert on secondary vocational education trainings aimed at giving young women a better chance of succeeding on the labour market are theoretically conceivable but difficult to realize in practice due to the obstacles posed by the bureaucratic nature of the system of formal (i.e. school based) education and its institutions.

The social inequalities interviewees highlight are related to the lack of freedom in migration decision of a marginalised social stratum pushed to the impoverished outskirts (i.e. the former agricultural centres of Hortobágy and Körösszegapáti). The solidarity in the local societies, the locally accessible (medical and educational) services and the former undoubtedly liveable nature of the case study settlements are seen as pull factors, but they are not considered strong enough to overcome the unbearable burden of unemployment. Furthermore, there is a general agreement – especially by representatives of NGOs – that members of the younger generations are not included in shaping development policy. This is supported by the findings of the questionnaire survey: the overwhelming majority of the surveyed secondary school students – and especially those living in villages – believe that their perspectives are not considered by decision-makers. These factors contribute to the feeling of no perspective typical of the youth in these areas, and also weaken their attachment to the region and their hometowns.

As a consequence, the *proposals of the expert interviewees* concentrate mainly on the need to fight unemployment, and to a lesser degree, poverty. But these proposals rather serve to call the attention to the problems of national regulation, the difficulties that municipality institutions must face in order to stay operative and the lack of financial resources. There are, however, examples of successful application for finances, and effective organization of public employment projects which could be spread in the region serving as best practices.

### **3.3 Conclusions for policy recommendations**

Based on the expert interviews and the discussions we consider the abolition of gender-blindness an essential task: awareness needs to be raised to the gendered character of society, migration, settlements, labour market, etc. and the importance of gender mainstreaming in development projects should be emphasized.

The opinion of the experts seems to confirm the assertion included in the Youth Strategy of the Észak-Alföld region declaring the 'lack of employment, money and perspective' as the three characteristic problems younger generations are facing today. Along with economic and employment policy (and youth policy) as the sectoral government policies deemed most important in relation to the issue in question (for our proposals in connection with these policies see chapter 7), specialists emphasized the significance of settlement and community development in rural areas:

- They firmly advocated that an assessment of the local strengths (resources) of the underdeveloped Észak-Alföld region be carried out with the participation of younger inhabitants – especially those living in smaller



settlements or poor conditions – so that the new future strategies and prospects for these villages may incorporate their interests as well.

- They stress the exceeding importance of creating and supporting a feeling of community and the special role women can play in bringing this about. Among many other possibilities this can be achieved by supporting youth networks and creating new community spaces as well as extending existing ones.
- They consider locally available kindergartens and school-based education programs preparing students for vocational training equally important in preserving communities.
- They suggest that the issue of providing all the preconditions (ranging from tax cuts to infrastructure) necessary in order to fulfil the requirements of successful local business activity is the key to development.
- They expect that national legislation and rural policy (alongside sectoral policies) take the special needs and wants of the youth of the villages into account as well as the specific nature of the settlement structure of the Észak-Alföld region.

#### **4. In-depth interviews with young women**

Mapping the experiences, plans and opinions of young women taking part in the study (as well as their acquaintances and relatives) on the issue of migration is an important objective of our research. This objective is of especially great magnitude in the Hungarian context as regional studies and regional policy both fail to give voice to women and the youth. Prospective interviewees were chosen by means of snowball sampling at all four surveyed sites using the initial help of municipality officials in charge of recording residents, migrants. So far we have contacted 23 interviewees, 7 in Körösszegapáti, 6 in Hortobágy and 5 each in Tiszaszentmárton and Abádszalók. 8 of our interviewees are between the ages 20–29, 12 are in the age group 30–39, and 3 are over 40 years old (40–42). 12 interviewees are married while the rest of them are single, divorced or living with boyfriends, girlfriends or partners in a roughly even ratio. 8 of the female interviewees are childless, but we also interviewed a mother raising 5 children. The income and employment status of our interviewees varies between unemployed persons living in deep poverty, parents on maternity leave, a woman who stays at home caring for her disabled husband, employees, entrepreneurs and people working at public employment programs. There are interviewees who only finished primary school in their adulthood, while others have multiple university degrees and there are some who study while working full time jobs. Hungarian and Romani/Gypsy women very different statuses have agreed to share their experiences with us from those living in the inner parts of rural settlements to those living in the outlying areas entire lacking public

supplies. Since the present study concentrates on the diversity of possible migration incentives, paths, and decisions, the accounts of interviewees will be grouped according to this perspective in the following sub-chapters.

#### **4.1. Return migrants/inmigrants**

In the 4 studied settlements, we prepared in-depth interviews with a total number of 5 women who lived at the settlement in question since their childhood, then moved away, but ended up returning eventually (2 of these interview partners were between 25–30 years of age and 3 were in the age group 35–39). Among them, there were single and married women and women with partners (i.e.: common-law husbands) alike some had 1-2 children others had none. The additional 7 immigrant interviewees were also selected from the 4 studied settlements. These interview partners were married or divorced, all raising children, and over 35 years of age. One of our interviewees from Hortobágy is in a category of her own as a 28 year old single mother of two (expecting a third child) who was driven to contradicting migration decisions by unemployment and domestic violence and migrated in, then out then returned again although, according to the information we gathered such stories are not at all exceptional in the former premises and residential estates of socialist co-operative farms and state farms of Hortobágy.

Those who “returned home”, mainly did so due to family affairs: they married someone from the area or moved here because their husband or boyfriend had /wanted to migrate, or returned to a divorced or widowed parent. The two younger interview partners left their home due to career reasons, one of them to Budapest, but she thought it was important to accompany her boyfriend when he moved back to their home settlement as he got a job there. She is no longer sure however, if she would decline an offer to work abroad at a suitable position for the sake of the same relationship today. The other younger return migrant interviewee was a single woman who went to work at an industrial plant in Székesfehérvár (in Transdanubia). Even though she was able to bear working several shifts and often doing overtime and had no trouble living in a sublet, she was eventually forced to return, because her salary decreased following the recent economic crisis. Now, she is desperately looking for a job, and since there is no real chance of finding one in Körösszegapáti, her return is most likely only a temporary one too.

Inmigrants were originally coming from neighbouring villages or villages from the same county, even if they moved in after spending a brief period of their lives in Budapest or, in one case, even London. In Körösszegapáti – like in other settlements along the national border – Romanian citizens bought up a number of houses, and therefore we thought it worthwhile to interview a 35 year old woman who moved in from Oradea, Romania. Marital and family affairs are typical in the background of decision-making for members of this group too (one

of our interviewees moved to Abádszalók from Győr in order to get start her married life). Very few are eligible for the kind of employment opportunities that can pull immigrants to these villages. One such opportunity is teaching at the local elementary school which one of our interview partners cited as her reason for moving into the village. The Romanian immigrant (who had been living in Budapest for some time before moving to the village) from Oradea was the first interviewee to cite value aspects (such as: 'the city throws everyone off balance') along with lower real estate prices as her main reasons to come to the area. The latter reason turns out to be the exclusive motive for immigration in some cases: buying a cheap house in the residential estates of the former socialist co-operative farm proved to be the solution of the family of one of the interview partners to the suffocating threat of indebtedness.

A third of the immigrants or return migrants who moved to the surveyed settlements are seriously considering the idea of leaving again either in search of better chances for their children or because they cannot find employment in the village.

#### **4.2. Out-migrants**

It is rather difficult to follow the path of those who have already moved away from these settlements. So far we have only succeeded in tracking down two former Körösszegapáti inhabitants, one of them through the interview done with her father. One of these two out-migrants is a 26 years old woman living in a common-law marriage in one of the biggest cities of Transdanubia (Győr), while the other is a 31 years old married woman with a first child only recently born, living in Budapest. Both have university degrees and one can already understand from their examples that inhabitants with tertiary education do not necessarily leave the Észak-Alföld region due to a lack of suitable employment opportunities. One of them has a degree in healthcare and could work in a number of cities with that kind of qualification while the other failed to find employment appropriate to her qualifications in her present city of residence either. The importance of university or college more likely consists of the social network that offers help in finding a partner and influences the choice of residence.

Our interviewees do not wish to return to their old villages or other areas in its region and in the background of their negative decision there may be some value choices like those voiced by our interviewee living in Győr. There are specific lived experiences of lifestyle and living conditions in the background of her decision: she studied in Győr and then for a while lived with her boyfriend in the regional centre Debrecen. *„Here [in Debrecen] we do not get the salary, the appreciation, the environment that one expects with a diploma. ... Győr is a developing city and its people are thinking that way. Here [referring to her native village]. there is no improvement, while there is development there. ... We were always searching for developing areas and places where we could join*

*that kind of momentum.*" She likes her native village and likes the "open space" and "freedom" of villages in general which she believes "city life cannot compensate". But she dislikes the "traditional family concept" and the "narrow-mindedness" in her native village and thinks that there "people live with a lot more stress which doesn't lead anywhere", although she admits that this sort of worry is mainly caused by financial difficulties.

It is important to note, that both of the interviewees mentioned above are registered as permanent citizens under the address of their parents. One of them cited lack of time and frequently changing sublets as the reason for this. The father of the other presumes that with her child recently born, his daughter will now soon change her official address to match her actual home.

### **4.3. Stayers**

We managed to conduct interviews with 7 women coming from all of the 4 villages who *lived at the settlement in question since their childhood*. Three of them (aged 20–25) have boyfriends but are not married yet. The rest of them are over 30 and married with the exception of one divorcée, two having one child and another two with 3 and 4 children respectively. Some of them do not intend to leave, while others do not know yet if they want to. These seven interview partners did not complain about local public services (to the contrary, a few of them actually praised these services) and are generally fond of their place of residence. If necessary, they would move not because of such problems, but rather due to the lack of jobs in the area and they presume that the migration decisions of other young men and women also result from this problem. The interviews called our attention to the importance of gender relations within families and that of the ethnic composition of the villages. In families with traditional male-female relationships characteristic of the Gypsy community like the family of one of our Gypsy interview partner, it is unimaginable that the wife should go abroad for work before the husband, while it is quite natural the other way around. At the same time she would completely understand if her son were to leave the village, because "he needs to find employment" – this is something the rest of our interviewees all agreed with even if they rather wished to stay themselves.

The demand to get engaged in the primary labour market is so strong that it delays other needs, even marriage and establishing a family. During the research, we encountered a *bi-local migrant/stayer*, who has a common-law husband living in a nearby small town and who – together with her partner – alternates places of residence between her flat/settlement and his one. Even though she is 29 years old, she still holds off marriage and children in order to find a settlement where both she and her partner can find employment.

**Table 4 Profiles of the participants of the in-depth interviews**

	Job situation	Family situation	Migration biography	Key motives
Inmigrant 1	Without job, on nursing benefit (the husband is disabled)	Married, lives with 1 grandchild (3 adult children)	Moved from another village, inside the region	Migrated here because they had to sell their house (mortgage problem) and found a cheaper one here
Inmigrant 2	On maternity leave	Married, 1 child	Moved here from Oradea/Romania (living also in Budapest)	Wanted 'rural life' for their child, cheap real estate near to the border; they want to stay till children are small
Inmigrant 3	Entrepreneur (farmer)	Married, 2 children	Migrated here from a nearby village	Got married here, she does not think that they could find better job elsewhere but she is thinking about it
Inmigrant 4	Employed	Married, 2 children	Migrated from a small town, within É-Alföld	She got married and would like to migrate out
Inmigrant 5	Employed	Married, 2 children	From a nearby village, within É-Alföld	Got married and does not want to migrate (likes the village and her job /teacher)
Inmigrant 6	Employed	Divorced (2 times), 2 children	Grown up in a nearby village, moved to Budapest with her husband to work; after divorced, migrated to London, after married again moved to this village, then divorced again	Came here to have children, established real-estate business but as divorced and having financial difficulties, wants to find job elsewhere and leave the village
Inmigrant 7	Employed	Divorced (2 times), 2 children	Migrated here from Győr (Transdanubia)	Got married here then divorced but prefers the rural life, likes the village and does not want to migrate out
In-out-remigrant	Unemployed	Unmarried, 2 children (pregnant)	Migrated here from another village then migrated out then back again	Looked for job, cheap rented apartment; escaped from here because domestic violence, came back for an apartment
Remigrant 1	Unemployed, on public employment	Unmarried, no child	Migrated to Székesfehérvár/Transdanubia because of a job	Would like to migrate out as cannot get a job even in the small region
Remigrant 2	Unemployed, on public employment	Unmarried, has a boyfriend	Migrated to Budapest because of a job and returned with her boyfriend	Her boyfriend got a job here and she followed him but now is thinking on migration to Germany
Remigrant 3	Employed	Married, 1 child	Returned from Budapest (where lived after moving to Eger/É-Magyarország and Debrecen)	Her father died and the family needed her help at home
Remigrant 4	Employed	Married, 1 child	Returned from Eger/É-Magyarország	Got married

Remigrant 5	Employed	Married, 2 children	Migrated to É-Magyarország as a child with her parents but she returned back	Got married
Stayer 1	Employed	Unmarried, has a boyfriend	She has been living in the village from her childhood (her parents migrated here inside this region when she was 2 year old, her mother used to live here)	Whether to leave or stay here depends on the employment possibilities for her and her boyfriend
Stayer 2	Unemployed, on public employment	Unmarried, has a boyfriend	Stayer, probably will migrate	Looking for jobs with her boyfriend, they want to get married, but likes living here
Stayer 3	Unemployed	Married, 4 children	Stayer	Would move only if her husband found a job (gipsies)
Stayer 4	Unemployed	Married, 3 children	Lives in the village from her childhood (her father moved here from another village inside the region with his children when their mother died)	Her (gipsy) family is here, she does not want to migrate out
Stayer 5	Employed	Divorced, 1 child	Stayer	Although recognises the deteriorating situation of the village, she is optimistic and does not want to leave (has a good job here as a teacher)
Stayer 6	Employed	Unmarried	Stayer	Would like to migrate to Eger/É-Magyarország: she likes that town, has relatives there and would like to learn and work there
Stayer 7	Employed	Married, 1 child	Was born here	She does not want to leave, likes her village and job (kindergarten teacher)
Stayer / Bi-local migrant	Unemployed, on public employment	Lives in a common-law marriage	Was born here, her partner lives in a nearby small town and she alternates places of residents with him	Migration decision depends on where they can get jobs for both of them
Out-migrant 1	On maternity leave	Married, 1 child	Moved to Budapest	Learned at a college in Budapest and got married there. She does not want to return back
Out-migrant 2	Employed	Lives in a common-law marriage	Migrated to Győr /Transdanubia, came back to Debrecen/É-Alföld with her partner then back to Győr	First went to a university then to live there (for better life and living conditions than in this region)

#### 4.4. Conclusions for policy recommendations

- The interviewed women have no knowledge of the unbalanced sex ratio of their settlements, and some of them try to explain the phenomenon of selective migration by saying things along the lines of „women have higher standards and they are brave enough to go and try to improve their situation while young men are less independent and rather stay with their parents“. This supports the need to encourage awareness of the fundamental questions of the SEMIGRA project.
- The delay between actual migration and its official registration – or the complete failure to register – is a matter worth reconsidering not only for the sake of a more accurate database, but also in order to be able to understand better the role administrative practice plays in encouraging or discouraging attachment to settlements.
- Attending secondary school in a nearby town does not seem to be in itself a strong enough inducement to make our interviewees leave their home towns, it is rather attending higher education in a different city that may have such effect. Several of the young female respondents are constantly trying to train themselves in order to have better chances of succeeding at the labour market. But in order to cover tuition fees a growing number of people turn to the sort of – generally transnational – migration that promises quick money and is originally intended only for a short period of time.
- Interview partners unequivocally identify the lack of employment opportunities in villages as the basic reason for moving away. The migration pressure is in some cases especially severe on women while sometimes it affects both sexes equally. Village women with young children suffer a disadvantage in the competition for jobs requiring employees to commute. Furthermore, several interviewees reported losing their jobs after the period of maternity leave.
- Demographic and family policy (also) faces a serious challenge in the delaying effect migration of jobseekers has on marriages and starting a family.
- Interview partners were very fond of their home villages and this image plays an important role in keeping them in their communities even if it arises as a resultant of both “pull” and “push” factors. The calm and friendly atmosphere of these communities, their “fresh air”, the availability of gardens and the sentiment of “everyone knows everyone” are all often cited as advantages of living in a rural milieu even if respondents – especially immigrants – acknowledged the negative side of the last instance. Many mothers ascribed significant importance to the effect of these social and environmental advantages on the upbringing of their children and identified

this as their main reason to stay in their village. Almost every interviewee alluded to a feeling of security that owning real-estate property – either personally or through their parents – in the village provides. But on the other hand, many believe that the distinctly low value of rural real-estate compared to city prices actually happens to be the main obstacle of mobility because it would require them to take on large loans if they decided to leave. Although they consider life in the village cheaper, it is undeniable that the notable distance of cities makes the using certain public services more expensive. As the settlements included in case studies have more than 1000 inhabitants, kindergartens and schools as well as basic commercial and healthcare services are available locally, therefore, the majority of women we asked did not complain about the lack of these services or their low quality. Those who were critical usually emphasised that the services they need for bringing up their children are not adequate or accessible in the village, and this is why they eventually decide on leaving their community.

- According to our interview partners, outmigrants who leave in search of employment “have to go at least as far as Budapest”. Other than the capital city, there are only a few Western-Hungarian cities and some Western-European countries they consider. Even Debrecen fails to attract jobseekers and serve as a real alternative in the Észak-Alföld region it is the centre of. This is partly due to the inability of the micro-regional centres in the surveyed areas of the Észak-Alföld region to function as true labour market hubs which is not surprising considering that they have difficulties sustaining enough jobs for their own population. And even if they offer surplus employment, the demand only rarely goes beyond cheap labourers. The pressuring nature of the incentives to migrate is emphasized by a general displeasure with urban lifestyle, the lack of “open space” and the idea of living in big housing estates designed in the socialist period.
- Interpersonal networks and relationships deemed very strong in village communities by a number of interviewees – especially immigrants from larger cities – help women deal with the everyday difficulties of local life (e.g. attending to children during the time for seasonal employment). At the same time the number of acquaintances travelling by bus to work in Budapest or cities in Transdanubia in an organized setting has grown according to the account of interviewees. These workers eventually move to these more developed regions and thus serve as connections facilitating the eventual migration of the villagers who stayed behind. In essence these networks therefore serve as another factor that may speed up the process of outmigration.
- The motivations and incentives of immigrants and return migrants cannot definitely serve as a basis for an effective migration policy:



- Return migration resulting from family affairs cannot be considered a “best practice” approach. But they underline the need for harmonizing the policy targeting male and female migration;
- Low real-estate prices are not necessarily advantageous for migration policy, because they often end up perpetuating poverty.

## **5. Results of the SWOT based on the analysis**

We prepared the SWOT analysis in view of the scientific literature published on the topic of the Észak-Alföld region and after reviewing the assessments of the documentation of development plans concerning the region and conducting a statistical analysis and a questionnaire survey. As we drafted the analysis, we also took the experiences gathered during the interviews and workshops into consideration. This conclusive evaluation applies to the entire region, but in contrast with other SWOTs drafted in preparation of development programs/strategies for the same region, our analysis concentrates on a specific set of problems. Namely, our SWOT analysis includes a close review of the region’s most important internal strength and weaknesses as well as the external characteristics and trends – identifiable either as opportunities or threats – responsible for or can stop the (re)production of the unbalanced sex ratio of the region’s youth. It identifies the factors (weaknesses and threats) that should be altered in order to stop the deterioration of the imbalance and put an end to the contribution of outmigration of the youth – and especially women - to the growing lack of young women in rural micro-regions. Finally, the analysis also lists the factors (strengths and opportunities) which could, and should be used in the future to change these negative demographic trends as they have the potential to decrease outmigration and increase immigration.

After drafting the initial SWOT, we shared the analysis with the participants of the regional workshop held in January 2012, and asked them to evaluate its content (outlining the most important elements of all four fields), contribute their own recommendations and join a discussion on the proposals. During the evaluation – apart from one exception among both strength and weaknesses – each element was considered important by at least one expert. On rare occasions it did happen, that someone suggested the removal of a statement, but the SWOT remained unchanged even on these occasions, as there always was at least one expert who considered that specific statement to be important.

Under strengths, participants primarily endorsed our statement emphasising the importance of the diverse and developed system of tertiary, vocational and adult education. The other statements receiving a considerable number of votes and points were the following: „factors underpinning attachment to communities: cultural and landscape values, healthy environment, traditional forms of association”; “municipality employment programs founded on internal resources and model community and social co-operative initiatives based on local supply

and demand”; and lastly “high ratio of big villages with well-established basic local public supply”.

Experts believed the region’s most serious weakness was its very low GDP, but the pertinent statement only received slightly more votes and points than the one citing „intense social tensions, deepening poverty, ghettoized rural regions and outskirts”. The expert assessment and evaluation stressed the important role of two statements in addition to the ones mentioned above: “economic necessity outweighs family as a factor in shaping women’s migration plans” and “substantial and growing migration loss, large-scale decrease of population number in villages”.

Among the opportunities elaborated in the SWOT, it was the statement mentioning the tendency that „social policy aimed at improving youth employment and supporting transition to adult life gains momentum” which most of the experts considered essential to realize. Although only half so enthusiastically, but there were two other statements our experts emphasised: “EU CAP-reform: multiple available forms of aid assisting complex rural development (at the expense of direct subsidies)” and “intensifying demand for touristic assets of environmental and cultural nature – amplified demand for high quality, custom and organic products, promotion of ecological farming.”

Finally, experts reckoned that the failure of regional policy to address spatial inequalities was the greatest threat for the project, directly followed by the challenge articulated in the statement mentioning the “increasing migration pressure resulting from the growing regional disparity caused by the persisting economic crisis”. A number of experts stressed the threats posed by the emergence of extremism, the effects of the so-called “brain-drain”, the deteriorating conditions of public employment projects and the scarcity of operating capital in the region.

Taking the proposals of individual evaluations and the results of the discussion all into account, the outcome of the SWOT analysis can be summarized as shown in the following table (*Table 4*).

**Table 5 SWOT analysis**

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The majority of internal migrants move inside their counties.</li> <li>• Észak-Alföld is the region with the highest proportion of young age groups.</li> <li>• The majority of secondary school age girls express plans to continue their education – significant flexible and re-trainable work force.</li> <li>• High rate of R&amp;D expenditures and people employed in R&amp;D sector in Debrecen</li> <li>• Diverse and developed system of tertiary, vocational and adult education.</li> <li>• Nationally and internationally renown tourist attractions, environmental and cultural assets in rural areas.</li> <li>• Municipality employment programs founded on internal resources and model community and social co-operative initiatives based on local supply and demand.</li> <li>• Available low-priced real estate property in villages.</li> <li>• High ratio of big villages with well-established basic local public supply.</li> <li>• Factors underpinning attachment to communities: cultural and landscape values, healthy environment, traditional forms of association.</li> <li>• Attachment of secondary school students to their hometowns.</li> <li>• Secondary school girls link professional success and family life with the notion of healthy environment in their scale of values.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Substantial and growing migration loss, large-scale decrease of population number in villages.</li> <li>• Very low GDP.</li> <li>• Relatively small number of active enterprises.</li> <li>• Underdeveloped nature of the sectors that could provide employment for women and people with low educational level.</li> <li>• High ratio of unemployed men and inactive women.</li> <li>• Excessive ratio of job-seekers who completed no more than 8 years of primary education.</li> <li>• Unfavourable conditions of commuting especially for young women.</li> <li>• Poor access to public supplies from tiny villages and town peripheries – a number of functionally weak urban centres.</li> <li>• Economic necessity outweighs family as a factor in shaping women's migration plans.</li> <li>• Incomes fall behind the national average and are unequal for men and women.</li> <li>• Rural local society expects and projects support for conservative gender roles.</li> <li>• Intense social tensions, deepening poverty, ghettoized rural regions and outskirts.</li> <li>• High crime rate (especially regarding offences against the person, family and youth).</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EU CAP-reform: multiple available forms of aid assisting complex rural development (at the expense of direct subsidies)</li> <li>• Growing cross-border economic co-operation, dynamic development of major centres of neighbouring countries.</li> <li>• Increasing foreign demand for real-estate in villages.</li> <li>• Intensifying demand for touristic assets of environmental and cultural nature – amplified demand for high quality, custom and organic products, promotion of ecological farming.</li> <li>• Atypical forms of employment and entrepreneurship spread with the emergence of the information society primarily to women's benefit.</li> <li>• Growing emphasis on equal opportunity policy and anti-discriminatory action.</li> <li>• Public opinion responsive to dissimilar gender needs.</li> <li>• Social policy aimed at improving youth employment and supporting transition to adult life gains momentum.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing migration pressure resulting from the growing regional disparity caused by the persisting economic crisis.</li> <li>• Scarcity of foreign direct investment in the region.</li> <li>• Expanding impact of "brain drain" on local youth.</li> <li>• Inefficiency of regional policy aimed at compensating spatial inequalities; impoverished rural areas often left to their own resources.</li> <li>• Increasing centralization of public administration and public-utility services – leading to worsening employment opportunities for women in villages and further reduction of accessible services.</li> <li>• Failure to promote the application of flexible working conditions facilitating the employment of villagers raising young children.</li> <li>• Continued deterioration of conditions for public employment, steps towards the criminalization of poverty.</li> <li>• Decreasing state funding of NGOs and voluntary work.</li> <li>• Rising political extremes, growing social prejudice – lack of solidarity and tolerance.</li> </ul>

## **6. Scenarios: Possible futures of the region**

The scenarios of the possible future of the Észak-Alföld region and their effects relevant to the present study – i.e. the changes that can be expected based on the scenarios concerning the unbalanced sex ratio of the region's rural areas and the migration loss recorded among young women (especially among the age group 30-39) – were based on the most important characteristics and correlations elaborated by the SWOT analysis.

The first of the three scenarios we drew up can be construed as limited fulfilment of the opportunities outlined during the elaboration of external factors and simultaneous rise of realistic threats, which may curtail the chances to mobilize internal resources and enhance unfavourable impacts. (*Deteriorating external conditions*)

The second scenario outlines a possible future that permits changing the unequivocally unfavourable path the region has currently taken and provides for a gradual shift of external conditions towards creating a realistic, though limited, chance of gradually exploiting opportunities thus abating unfavourable impacts and enabling the determination and realization of paths towards progress through the mobilization of existing internal resources. (*Positive turn*)

According to the premise of the third scenario, the occurring rapid favourable advancement of external features not only creates the possibility for balanced development, but also offers new directions for improvement that genuinely moderate unfavourable features and afford the achievement of new development perspectives through the swift mobilization of internal resources. (*New momentum, novel approach*)

### **6.1. Deteriorating external conditions**

Austerity measures induced by the enduring European economic and financial crisis and the imbalance of the national budget along with hectic exchange rates and the absence of a consistent economic policy wear out the domestic resources of economic growth on the one hand, and compel foreign and local investors to reduce capital thus further deteriorating the already critical state of employment. Without substantial investment the prospects of creating jobs and improving the national activity rate – which is already exceedingly unfavourable in European comparison – will stay bleak and larger urban centres will remain the only settlements with development potential while employment opportunities in rural areas will continue to plummet. Public employment programs constitute the sole large scale source of employment opportunities available to those with low levels of education, but due to decreasing state funds and the low 160EUR monthly wages (together with the mere 100EUR state benefit received by the long-term unemployed) these programs fail to provide life chances to the rural poor thus threatening them with the danger of being pushed en masse into the underclass and threatening the country with the rise of a split society. These

factors may together contribute to the rise of a critical social situation in most rural settlements, substantially boosting the migration of residents who are still able to leave these bleak communities: i.e. members of the younger generation, residents with higher levels of education and – as a result of the generally physical nature of public employment work – women. This in essence may result in the intense selective outmigration of high status social groups and inhabitants with higher levels of education creating a vicious circle of regressing private and public sector services that amplify migration incentives in turn (and vice versa).

Decreasing state revenues incite the government to centralize administrative and human services citing reasons of efficiency leading to the reduction of employment opportunities in the public sector which has an adverse effect on the situation of women. On the surface these changes could be seen as benefitting micro-regional centres, but in practice, the jobs disappearing in peripheral settlements far outnumber those created in the centres. As long as such actions as these are not coupled with planned development of community transportation requiring massive financial resources they may result in the ghettoization of entire settlements and the rural surroundings of micro-regional centres let them be clusters of villages or larger detached settlement peripheries typical of the Észak-Alföld region.

As autonomous local communities gradually lose their weight they cease to be capable of identifying and supporting local resources and so a few successful businesses remain the sole forms of isolated modernization in the affected areas. The clear consequences of this scenario are increasing outmigration, fast-paced ageing, accumulation of the already disadvantaged Roma population in the peripheral areas lacking development prospects, intensifying social fragmentation, growing intolerance, emerging prejudices and the spreading prominence of conservative family structure and traditional gender roles.

## **6.2. Positive turn**

As the current economic and financial crisis gradually passes, investors may rediscover the development potential of the eastern regions of Central Europe. This is especially true for Hungary due to the country's fortunate transport connections, developed infrastructure and information networks, relatively low tax level in European and regional comparison and the mass availability of cheap, skilled or trainable labour. If these conditions were enhanced by a growth-oriented economic policy that supports job-creating investment and dismantles bureaucratic impediments, the country's economy could be shifted out of its almost half a decade long state of stagnation and contraction. Such policy would not only improve unemployment rates, generate income and induce consumption, but also help the country outgrow its decade-long budget imbalance opening up additional funds for the purposes of decreasing unemployment or stimulating the economy. This could bring about substantial

change and contribute to a significant rise in the nation's low activity rate which is the heaviest burden on Hungarian society, economy and the central budget. The rate is remarkably low in European comparison, not only falling 12-18% behind the data corresponding to more developed European countries but also lagging 7-8% behind the rates of the other Central European nations.

The introduction of a policy such as elaborated above would have a double effect on the labour market of rural areas. On the one hand, market prosperity would strengthen local businesses and therefore increase employment to some degree per se. On the other hand the dynamic centres more rapidly reacting to improving circumstances would attract the workforce of these communities and therefore outmigration incentives would become stronger.

The latter factor assigns a more favourable position to the rural areas centring on localities that are able to establish connections with these dynamic areas as a consequence of their location, economic potential or the size of their population. Areas with centres that already have these attributes or may undergo improvement in order to have them will suffer smaller migration losses and their central settlements will show signs of development. This eventually may bring the inhabitants of these areas genuine advances regarding the issues of employment and access to private and public sector services by means of relocating or commuting to the central settlement. Thus the central settlements of these areas along with the smaller villages in their close proximity may undergo rapid development. Settlements further away from the centres may also experience a lesser degree of development (due to the central locality's ability to attract their workforce as well as the improvement of the services it can offer) provided that they have proper transport connections with the central settlement. Ageing communities or ghettoized villages with accumulated Roma population situated in disadvantageous areas far from central settlements will continue to experience stagnation or contraction. As long as the central settlement is not able to properly convey the dynamic growth to the villages in its vicinity, stagnation and contraction will keep their hold. However, even the villages experiencing stagnation, contraction and selective outmigration may partake in the effects of the positive turn as it would allow the central government to fulfil expectations to widen financial support for local public services and public employment programs.

According to this possible scenario villages may on the whole experience moderately decreasing outmigration among women and the youth. Positive turn promises to replace the lack of perspective signified by the prevalence of the desire to move "as far from here as possible" with the broadening role of regional centres and dynamically developing medium sized towns which would offer new opportunities primarily to inhabitants with higher levels of education. The development of public and business services and their concentration in the central settlements of smaller areas may improve the employment opportunities

of residents with higher or medium levels of education and – if coupled with the application of flexible schedules and support for family-friendly work environment – provide substantial help for job-seeking women in specific. In the more fortunate central settlements, this could possibly be matched by growing number of available low-wage jobs. The prospects of residents of micro-regions bypassed by these channels of growth could possibly be improved by community-wide collaboration, successful local initiatives, public employment programs, social co-ops and the economy especially relying on the engagement of young women.

### **6.3. New momentum, novel approach**

Unless augmented with planned policy, conscious intervention and a novel approach, the positive turn scenario would lead to a remarkable differentiation of rural areas, but the scope of progressive effects may significantly expand provided that the unfavourable changes are balanced by an effective infrastructural, servicing and economic policy that is in line with the requirements of the ideal of sustainable development. Unfortunately in Hungary the formal recognition of the merits of such policy are not always accompanied by the actual implementation of provisions, even though their validity has been well established on the European level for some time.

Regarding the employment opportunities of the lowly educated and not easily re-trainable population accumulating in rural areas and local women, structural change significantly increasing the demand for agro-industrial labour can only be achieved through shifting to labour-intensive cultures and expanding the importance of the processing industry instead of the present arrangement of mechanized production of basic materials. Restructuring the distribution of development resources in order to benefit this shift may have the additional effect of increasing the employment potential of the local agro-business and encouraging the expansion of financial, organizational (cooperation, information) and business (storage, freight) services affected by it, eventually resulting in growing demand for employees with higher levels of education or specialized knowledge.

Alongside the influence of the state of the labour market, the standard of available public services constitutes the other major factor in fighting incentives of outmigration. Bringing education and the social public services offered by various institutions under state financing could create advancement. There is no hope of containing outmigration without family-friendly and child-friendly welfare policy and equal opportunity policy.

Unless a novel approach appreciating the disadvantages suffered by the inhabitants of these rural settlements takes prominence over the ever-powerful need for the efficiency of infrastructural development and establishment of transportation and information services, these areas cannot exploit the few

advantageous features they have (natural surroundings, healthy environment, humanscale communities) in order to attract families and individuals demanding the same living conditions as offered by the better-situated urban communities of today.

## **7. Conclusions and policy recommendations**

Over the course of the research it became unambiguous, that both the experts and the young women living in affected areas were unaware of the “lack” of women apparent from the demographical statistics corresponding to the younger age groups of the villages, small towns and rural micro-regions in the Észak-Alföld, and had no understanding of its detrimental consequences. The problem they emphasised was the outmigration of the youth in general. It is unclear however, whether this lack of awareness is rooted in the phenomenon of gender-blindness – a typical characteristic of Hungarian mentality –, or it indicates that the lack of women in Észak-Alföld has not (yet) reached the level measured in other regions surveyed within the scope of the SEMIGRA project and therefore, according to the respondents’ experiences, it does not have serious implications on everyday life.

But since there seems to be an agreement that the conditions enabling the local youth to stay in or return to their home region must be provided, we confidently conclude that regional strategies must aim to pay special attention to the groups exposed to higher outmigration rates (i.e. young women). Our research team reviewed various development policy documents in order to evaluate whether this aim had the potential to be put into practice. During this review, we concentrated on three important documents: i) the Észak-Alföld Region Strategic Program (for 2007–2013); ii) the Észak-Alföld Regional Youth Strategy (drafted in 2010-ben); and iii) the National Rural Development Strategy prepared by the government for the 2012–2020 planning period. The last of which identifies “youth and young families living in rural areas, planning to return to their rural home towns/villages or considering to immigrate to these areas” as one of its target groups, but fails to address the differing expectations and aims of men and women. Although the Youth Strategy is consistent in comparing the data corresponding to men and women in its assessment of the current situation, it disregards gender aspects when it comes to the determination of aims. Out of the three documents, the Strategic Program seems to be the most susceptible to the male-female relations, because it points out the general importance of the principle of gender equality.

Partly on the basis of these experiences, we assigned considerable time and effort at the regional workshop to the collective discussion of the possibilities of keeping youth, and especially young women, in the region and attract them to rural areas. The proposals offered by the participating experts can be summarized as follows:



1. *Job creation.* According to the experts, the development of the tourism industry, the re-emergence of the processing industry and a structural change in the agricultural sector are preconditions to the creation of more jobs. They stressed the importance of fostering entrepreneurial career paths and they mentioned the special need to improve the self-confidence and entrepreneurial ambition of women. In their opinion engagement in well-organized voluntary work may later improve the chances of the youth on the labour-market.
2. *Education.* Experts stressed the importance of the early development of capabilities, starting with kindergarten age children. They voiced their belief that the gendered nature of school-based vocational education should be abated, and girls should also be taught professions generally perceived as more masculine. They also added that the bureaucratic nature of the institutional system of education policy needs to be abolished and plans on the types of training offered by secondary schools should be made on the basis of surveying local demand.
3. *Youth Policy.* Following in the steps of the Regional Youth Policy, they emphasised the importance of fostering democratic socialization and civic participation among the youth. According to their opinion, the key areas requiring support in order to achieve this are popularizing voluntary work, extending the community spaces available to younger generations and shaping their prospects for the future.
4. *Village and rural development.* As elaborated earlier in chapter 3, our experts stressed the importance of community development and the special role women play in it. They also emphasised the key role of identifying local resources in co-operation with the youth and setting prospects for the future of the communities. They believe, that improving the local conditions of economic development (infrastructure, services, tax policy) and improving the quality of early education – referring to the service of kindergartens, also mentioned in the Regional Operational Program – offer further opportunities. Finally, they also voiced their support for inter-settlement and micro-regional co-operation.

Despite the SEMIGRA project's expedient manner of formulating questions, the integration of gender perspectives into development projects received little attention in the otherwise progressive suggestions. Therefore, even though specific development programs aimed at the youth, gender equality or the improvement of the situation of women are necessary in the region, our fundamental proposal is that the specific needs of young women and men in particular, as well as the needs of the youth in general and the gendered nature of the effects of individual policies and programs should be taken into account during the creation of regional, micro-regional and settlement level development policy or intervention.

**Table 6 Possibilities for youth- and gender-sensitive development policies in the Észak-Alföld region**

Strategic fields		Scales of agents'/actors' development/regulation activities			
		Local (LAU 2)	Regional (NUTS 2,3,4)	National (Hungary)	International (EU)
IMPROVE-MENT OF THE QUALITY OF LIFE	RURAL DEVELOPMENT	Active <i>young</i> citizens (representation of <i>gendered</i> interests toward local and macro-society and decision-makers in participatory planning)	Gender sensitive Regional Youth Strategy; programs; participatory planning; best practices in media	Gender sensitive National Youth Policy; Advocating participatory planning	Advocating participatory planning
		Community building (public/sport spaces both for <i>young women and men</i> , 'open schools'; common voluntary work; learning from each other gypsy, non-gypsy culture, old-new <i>gender roles</i> ; building positive local/ regional identity)	Programs; regional identity-building; regional networking of local communities; best practices in media	Promoting civic associations by laws and programs; gender equality in media	Promoting civic associations by development programs
		Home care, public catering (giving job mainly for local <i>young women</i> , and managed by the local government and/or social co-operatives joining with horticulture. marketing etc.)	Programs; training; best practices in media	Programs	Programs
		Cheap ground-plot, housing, tenement (promoting <i>young couples</i> , employed single <i>women with children</i> with small apartments in small towns, empty renewed houses in villages in the vicinity of towns)	Programs; common housing policy for small regions; best practices in media	Programs; financing forms	Programs
		Development of competence and practical skills (revealing <i>children's</i> competences from <i>child-hood</i> ; practice in home village/town enterprises during vocational training; teaching masculinised skills/professions for <i>girls</i> , too)	Re-organisation of education-governance on county level; urban–rural relationship in organising vocational training	Re-decentralisation of primary and secondary education media campaign against gender segregation of jobs	Programs
		Public-utility services helping <i>young women's</i> life and attachment to rural places and providing them jobs (high-quality and accessible day nursery, kindergarten, family day-nursery; paediatrics service; day-care centres for disabled in small towns, „Irish autistic farm model)	Programs; organising some services for small regions	Programs	Programs
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT EMPLOYMENT POLICY	RURAL DEVELOPMENT	Sustainable, structurally changed local economy (labour intensive activities, organic products, ecological farming, flexible processing plants, business services, tourism, which can provide jobs for <i>young women and men</i> )	Programs; new types of rural-urban relationship	A gender sensitive National Rural Development Strategy; advocating tax-policy	CAP-reform: multiple available forms of aid assisting complex rural development
		New economic actors, competitive, innovative SME-s (ran mainly by <i>young women</i> and/or applying tele-work, atypical work)	Programs; training especially young women; best practices in media	Advocating tax-policy; programs	Programs
		Social enterprises and co-operatives (especially in social services, community development, village-renewal, giving new jobs mainly for <i>young women</i> )	Programs; training especially young women; networking also at small region scale; best practices in media	Tax-policy; regulations promoting the joining public services and public employment programs	Programs
DEVELOPMENT OF THE ENVIRON-MENT	RURAL DEVELOPMENT	Protection of natural and cultural assets (exploration of the assets that makes rural areas more attractive; waste-management, 'green villages'; production of bio-briquette in public employment programs, which provides jobs for <i>young men and women</i> and makes living cheaper)	Programs; best practices in media	Programs	Programs
		Releasing from isolation (of <i>young men and women</i> living in villages with poor public transportation to urban centres; or in rural peripheries, and scattered farms; developing public services for segregated poor people)	Developing transport and communication, and integrated regions	Developing transport and communication	Developing transport and communication
YOUTH POLICY					
EQUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR WOMEN AND MEN					

Accordingly, we advocate the adoption of a system of planning which considers the issues of the young men and women in the segments sectorial development policies and rural development policy have in common and therefore, it assures the application of "youth policy" and equal opportunity for men and women as horizontal principles over the formulation of development objectives, the creation of programs and projects and the implementation of specific actions. The summary table attached to the present study is not a complete set of proposals, but rather serves as an example of a different planning approach that reconsiders existing strategies and actions. Although these proposals are addressed to agents operating on the regional level (and within that, on the county, micro-regional and settlement levels), connections permitting co-operation on the national and EU level are essential, so is the review of external effects of individual actions. It is clear, that without a dramatic rethinking of national demographic policy, the negative effects of migration experienced today cannot be overcome. This would include legislative acts, such as altering the system of GYED (childcare fee), GYES (maternity benefit) and GYET (child raising support), and therefore require intervention on the national level which is outside of the scope of the presents study.

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