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## Outlook for rural women in Central and Eastern Europe

### **Introduction**

The post-socialist transformation and the establishment of a capitalist system completely reshaped rural societies in former Eastern Bloc countries. The end of the socialist period, however, also rendered life more uncertain and unpredictable for many. The economic transition has been particularly prolonged and difficult in most of the countryside.

After all, neither socialism nor capitalism provided equal opportunities for women so far. The socialist modernisation has brought two important consequences for rural women. The heavy feudal class structure disappeared, the unbreakable barriers of ownership, when rich married rich poor married poor did not count anymore. The other consequence was the liberation of women from closed family control and traditions. Thanks to education opportunities women could study and become also independent earners. However, life did not become easier for women. The low salaries, the two earners family model forced women to find jobs and besides that the burden and responsibility of the family and household also relied on them.

The new capitalism provided more freedom and also entrepreneurial opportunities for women. However these opportunities are rather limited for those rural women whose main agenda is daily survival, search for work and income for their families and themselves.

Studies that address the specific theme of gender inequality and the impact of economic transformation on rural inhabitants are quite rare. Gender inequality is rarely acknowledged as an important policy issue, and in many cases, gender and the principle of equal opportunities are still unfamiliar concepts.

This paper does not pretend to provide a comprehensive and systematic analysis, but, rather, focuses on the specific issues of employment and entrepreneurship in rural areas. My intention is to draw the reader's attention to the situation of rural men and women in Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries.

### **The CEE agricultural transition story of the 1990s**

The transformation of the agricultural sector caused by the political changes of 1989 and its aftermath has not followed a uniform pattern in all CEE countries. By and large, privatisation started quite rapidly with the emergence of a multiparty

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system and a market economy. Former agricultural structures established during the previous decades, which were usually large scale (except in Poland and Slovenia) either disappeared or were significantly transformed. The creation of new "real" owners in agriculture involved different forms of privatisation, ranging from restitution to partial compensation. In short, the process entailed the abolition of many large-scale units (cooperatives and state-controlled farms) and the return of land and property to private ownership. The beneficiaries were sometimes the original owners or their successors, sometimes those who had been involved in the establishment of the farming collective, and sometimes simply those with enough money to buy. As a result of this complicated and complex hand-over, millions of small agricultural units were created or re-established within a decade. Former state-owned farms were transformed into private enterprises (small, medium or large-scale). Similarly, former agricultural collectives were also transformed, though in several countries they were not broken up, and thus passed intact into large-scale production units.

Putting into historical perspective this transformation was the third one during the past five decades, when producers in most cases had to start something very new often from the basics.

The first transformation occurred after WW II when large feudal estates were broken up and the land was distributed among landless and poor peasants, allowing the resumption of peasant farming. The second took place in the 1950s and early 1960s with the establishment of large-scale collective farming and the disappearance of peasant holdings. The third began in 1989, with the privatisation of the large-scale cooperatives and state farms. In each of these periods, previous structures and ownership relations were swept away. Farms, whether large, medium or small, came under a new system of management, which involved changes in stocks, labour requirements and so on. Almost everything had to be rebuilt at the start of each new phase. Whereas in Western Europe agricultural holdings were passed on from generation to generation, with each adding something new to the family holding, in Central and Eastern Europe each generation had to start the farming enterprise almost from scratch.

The average farm size in CEECs is 5 ha, compared to the 18.7 ha average for the EU-15.<sup>2</sup> The number of CEE farms is 9.2 million, approximately one and half times the total for the EU-15 (6,769,180 farms).

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<sup>2</sup> Farm structure survey 1999/2000 Eurostat

Farm structure by size and area of cultivated land in CEEC-10						
		<5 ha	5 to <20 ha	20 to <50 ha	above 50	Total
Number of holdings	1000 holdings	7520	1384	216	63	9183
	%	82	15	2	1	100
Area cultivated	1000 ha	13319	13035	4557	18672	49583
	%	27	26	9	38	100
Average farm size	Ha	1	9	32	280	5

Source: The future of rural areas in the CEE new member states. Country Experts of the Network of Independent Agricultural Experts in the CEE Candidate Countries. (Table A 3.1.)

The above table shows that the two smaller categories account for 97% of farms and 53% of land under cultivation. The two larger categories account for just 3% of farms but 47% of the land under cultivation. Unfortunately, we do not have a statistical breakdown of the categories of people working on these holdings. An independent group of experts (INEXP)<sup>3</sup> believes that farms with at least 20 hectares under cultivation have the best chances of long-term survival.

The independent experts also looked at prospects for each of the above categories, including the small farms with least chance of survival, in relation to which they say: "The majority of them should be classified as subsistence or part-time farms which cannot provide sufficient income for the farm household. Hence, off-farm activities or social payments are required for receiving additional income. Over a long period, most of these holdings are probably unable to survive."

In reference to the second category (5-20 ha), INEXP says: "These farms with an average size of 9 ha, have a potential both to earn a substantial part of the farm family income from agricultural production and to grow in the future so as to remain economically viable."

As can be seen from the table above, the farms between 20 and 50 ha represent only 2% of the total number of farms in CEE and 9% of the cultivated area. The average size of these farms is 32 ha, one and half time bigger than the EU-15 average farm size.

The last category of farms above 50 ha is made up of large family-run and commercial farms. They amount to only 1% of the total number of farms, but account for 38% of all cultivated land. The average farm in this category is 280 ha, which is already of such a size that special knowledge, appropriate cash flow, machinery, and contacts with markets, suppliers and financial institutions are required for its successful management.

Farming in CEE countries is characterised by a "dual farm structure", in which numerous small-scale often subsistence or part-time oriented farms coexist with

3 The Future of Rural Areas in the CEE New Member States (2004) Network of Independent Agricultural Experts in the CEE Candidate Countries (Peter Weingarten), Institut für Agrarwicklung in Mittel-und Osteurope Halle, Germany, January 2004: <http://www.iamo.de>

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very large enterprises. A second major feature of CEE agriculture is land fragmentation. As the INEXP report (2004) observes, “the large holdings cultivate considerable lot sizes, while the small ones operate on very small plots; too small to use large machinery.”

This dual farm structure is not, however, the product of the economic transition. It was already a feature of socialist agriculture in several countries, and its roots ultimately lie in the feudal system. Structural development depends on whether medium-size family farms can grow strong enough to compete, or whether further concentration and fragmentation will ensue. The question is whether the dual farm structure can continue, or whether large-scale farms are destined to take over the small farms, leading to the formation of huge agricultural “empires.”<sup>4</sup>

While these features are similar to many CEE countries, countries and regions within countries face different challenges, and agricultural policies must reflect this diversity. The variety of structures found in the agricultural sectors demands specific measures that allow for their peculiarities. Similarly, the policies must also reflect the discrete objectives of the different countries. That said, all CEE countries seem to be committed to the common goal of avoiding the marginalisation of agriculture and keen to take advantage of existing opportunities (INEXP, 2004).

### **Rural employment, living standards and incomes in CEE countries**

The enlarged European Union has some long-standing member states with an agricultural employment level of just 2%, whereas in the new member states and accession countries, agriculture still accounts for a vast number of workers. Many economic studies point to the imminent disappearance of small farms, which leaves unanswered the question of what will happen the people for whom, as the INEXP group put it, “agriculture plays an important role as a social buffer.” EU and national policies need to answer these questions with some urgency, because the repetition of earlier historical patterns (emigration, industrialization) is not viable.

The different historical background of the CEE countries has endowed agriculture with a role unlike that it plays in the EU-15. A Eurostat employment and labour survey<sup>5</sup> points to the high level of employment in certain countries, and underscores the necessity of generating new jobs in rural areas.

*“With the exception of the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary and Slovakia, a considerably greater share of persons is employed in agriculture than in the EU. ...[T]his also means that the labour productivity in agriculture is extremely low and thus not competitive in the European or international context...[T]hese regions in the future will be subject to considerable adaptation pressure and the necessity to create other/new jobs for those persons who can no longer find employment here.”*

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4 The expression is from the keynote presentation of Professor Jan Douwe van der Ploeg at the XXI Congress of the European Society for Rural Sociology, Keszthely, Hungary, 2005.

5 Employment and Labour Market in Central European Countries 2002/1 Eurostat Theme: Population and Social Conditions, European Commission 2002, Luxembourg Office for Official Publications of the European Commission pp 31-32.

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Employment is crucial for the well-being of rural areas and the best defence against social exclusion and poverty. The INEXP group describes the rural employment and unemployment patterns in the CEE countries on NUTS 2 and NUTS 3 level. For example, “in 2001, the official (registered) unemployment rates in the new Member States ranged between 1.6% and 43% on the NUTS-3 level. Regions with an unemployment rate of less than 10% are the capitals and large cities, as well as the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Hungary, Romania and the coastal regions of Estonia.”

However, the NUTS 2 and NUTS 3 level analysis do not really show up the problems of subregions and rural communities. The NUTS 3 level maps are not able to show those subregions and local communities where the rural and agricultural unemployment can be 40-60%, or in some Roma ethnic villages even 90%.

The CEDAW<sup>6</sup> report of the Hungarian Government in 2000 provides some insights to grassroots level issues from the perspective of rural women:

*“Women’s quality of life is influenced fundamentally by the geographical location of their settlement, the degree of supply of the settlement, its distance from the more developed centre and so on. From the outset, women who live in small settlements (settlements with less than 1,000 inhabitants) and in very small villages have rather unfavourable odds to gaining social integration, to getting jobs, to accessing institutes for children and to accessing educational, health and social institutes.” (CEDAW Report of Hungary 2000. p 60).*

Women NGOs contributing to this report emphasised the challenges facing women in balancing family life with a bread-winning profession, and recommended that more benefits should be granted to family-friendly employers. They also highlighted that gender inequalities in pay persist, and that the salaries in women-only jobs are very low.

In spite of significant differences among CEECs in rural and agricultural employment, the INEXP group also described “several consistent features” relating to male and female employment patterns.

*“Average employment rates for men range from 73% in the Czech Republic and 71% in Romania to only 56% in rural Latvia and 54% in Slovakia. In rural areas, these rates are generally lower than in urban areas. Employment rates for women are, in all countries, lower than those for men, typically by around 7-8 percentage points. In the Czech Republic the difference between men and women is even 17 percentage points, whereas in Lithuania it is only 3 percentage points. Lower employment rates for women indicate that women are more involved in taking care of the family and have*

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6 The Government of Hungary submitted a combined fourth and fifth periodic Country Report to the Committee of CEDAW (the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women), which was examined at an Exceptional Session in 2002. The government attached the opinion of the women’s civic organizations to the Report, as well as providing written answers to the questions of the UN Committee. The CEDAW report complies with the legalistic demands of the Convention in its description of the state of women in Hungary.

*possibly more difficulties to find a job than men. Differences in the employment rates across the countries are partly caused by differences in registered unemployment rates.”*

In relation to subsistence agriculture and the informal economy, which have a powerful bearing on rural life in most CEE countries, the INEXP group notes that “people may organise their lives according to different paradigms than those that lie behind the statistics.” These “different paradigms” need further research and an appropriate policy response.

#### **Income from agriculture and the countryside**

Measured in terms of per capita GDP, many people living in rural regions of the new Member States of the EU, especially those whose regions are predominantly rural, are poor by the standards of the EU-15, and some are getting poorer. Some are living in conditions of extreme poverty, particularly in Latvia, Romania and Bulgaria. High unemployment and low educational achievement are also common banes.

It is hard to provide exact figures for rural and agricultural incomes in CEE countries. Even if one has the figures for a given country, it is difficult to make direct comparisons. Accordingly, rather than searching for precision among the statistics, I have tried to use other data from different sectors of the economy to assess agricultural incomes and propose some general conclusions.

Average income per farm, annual gross wages and GDP per capita in 2001

	Average income per farm (EUR)	Annual gross wages (EUR)	GDP per capita	
			(EUR PPP)	(% of EU-15 average)
Estonia	4 320 <sup>1)</sup>	3 936	8 500	38
Latvia	2 148 <sup>1)</sup>	3 360	6 600	29
Lithuania	465 <sup>2)</sup>	3 600	6 600	29
Poland	2 197 <sup>1)</sup>	6 684	8 700	39
Czech R.	1 1302 <sup>1)</sup>	5 160	13 500	60
Slovakia	105 960 <sup>1)</sup>	3 420	10 800	48
Hungary	2 673 <sup>3)</sup>	4 836	11 700	52
Slovenia	5 589 <sup>1)</sup>	11 856	16 100	72
Romania	n.a.	1 980	6 000	27
Bulgaria	n.a.	1 524	5 400	24

Notes: 1) Net Farm Income (NFI) in EUR/farm. 2) Net Farm Income (NFI) in EUR/ha. 3) Personal Income (PI) in EUR/farm.

Source: Country experts of the Network of Independent Agricultural Experts in the CEE Candidate Countries.

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The above table compiled by the Network of Independent Agricultural Experts makes it possible to make comparisons among CEE countries. Although no data is available for some countries, and some data, such as that for the Czech Republic and Slovakia, is hard to reconcile, we can see that, with the exception of Estonia, average income per farm is lower than the annual gross wage.

The latest World Bank report<sup>7</sup> on Poland (2004) gives a detailed picture of the situation in the biggest CEE country.

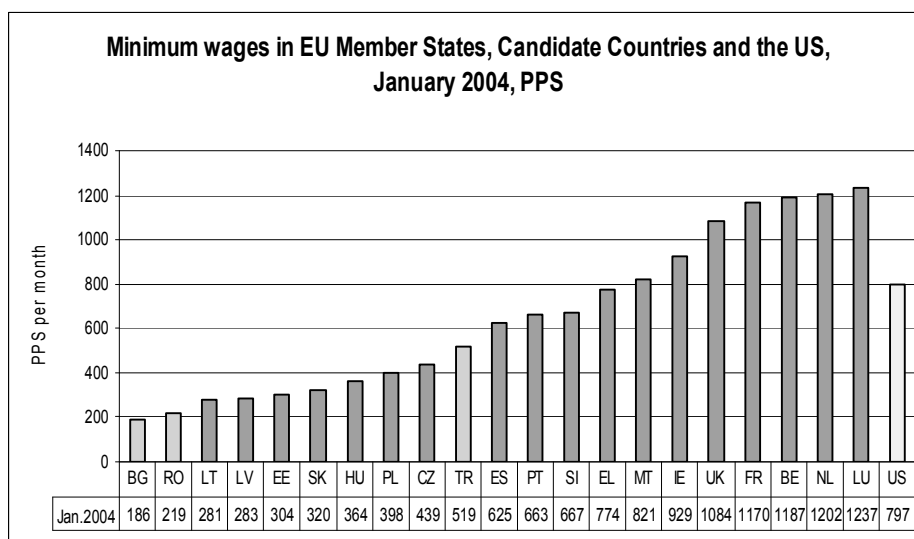
*“It is a paradox of the system transformation in Poland that the private peasant economy, which, compared to other segments of economy, was better prepared in ownership structure to adjust to the rules of the free market, has found itself in much more difficult circumstances. Private farmers working on their own lands as self-employed have experienced a radical worsening of their financial conditions. In 1999, 43.2 percent of households in urban areas and 66.2 percent in rural areas were below the social minimum level, and 3.7 percent in urban areas and 12 percent in rural areas were below the subsistence minimum (Zegar, 2002). Rural inhabitants account for about 70 percent of people considered as extremely poor. In the group of farmers, 13.3 percent have an income lower than the subsistence minimum. .... The problem of today’s rural areas lies in the dilemma of experiencing forced migration from agriculture, worsening the labour market outside of agriculture, or agreeing to the high hidden unemployment in agriculture (Zegar, 2002).” (118p)*

Precise data for wages and incomes is always hard to come by, so we need to adopt a method that can allow us to make some sort of assessment. The statistics for minimum wages in Europe are suitable to our purpose, and allow us to analyse incomes and wages in agriculture in CEE countries. The size of the salary gap between CEE and other EU countries is striking. Obviously, minimum wages are not revealing in themselves. If, however, we combine them with statistics for purchasing power parity, we find that the gap between the extremes, though still extremely wide, narrows somewhat.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> World Bank Report (2004) Gender and Economic Opportunities in Poland: Has transition left women behind? Report No. 29205. Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Unit. Europe and Central Asia Region.

<sup>8</sup> Anne Paternoster (2004) Minimum wages in EU Member States, Candidate Countries and the US. January 2004 PPS. Statistics in Focus. Population and Social Conditions. 10/2004. EUROSTAT.



Source: Statistics in Focus 10/2004 Eurostat

If we consider that 30-50% of wages in industry and services are at the minimum level, and bear in mind that agricultural wages are usually 10-20% lower than industrial wages, and that women's salaries are even lower than that by another 15-20%, then we can come up with a rough estimate for women's agricultural income.

We can also infer the low income of Romanian rural households from their very modest and self-sufficient way of living.

**Monthly income of households by urban and rural areas in Romania, 2001**

	Total monthly income of households		Monthly income per person	
	EUR	Ratio of urban/rural to total in %	EUR	Ratio of urban/rural to total in %
Urban households	217.4	108.5	76.9	110.7
Rural households	179.3	89.4	60.6	87.2
Total households	200.4	100.0	69.5	100.0

Source: Country experts of the Network of Independent Agricultural Experts in the CEE Candidate Countries (Coordinates of living conditions in Romania. Population incomes and consumption, NIS, Bucharest 2001).

This is not only a Romanian phenomenon. Rural populations in all the countries under consideration, even the more prosperous ones, include groups with similarly low incomes. In certain rural regions, a second generation of long-term



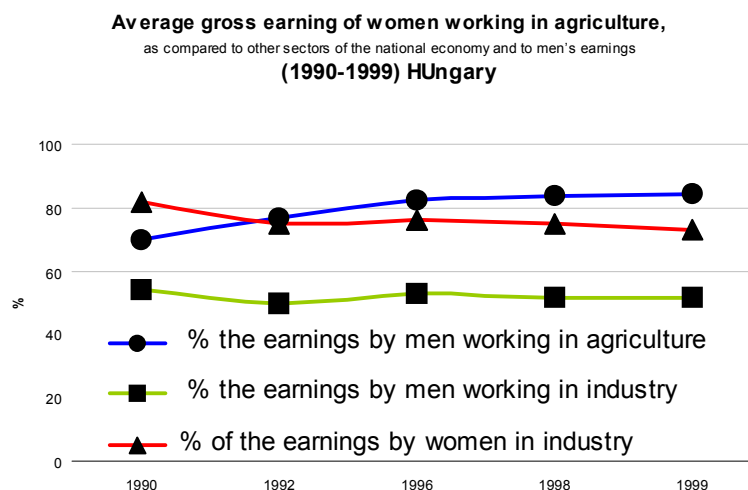
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unemployed now exists. These are people who never saw their parents go out to work and have no experience of living in a household with an employed person.<sup>9</sup>

Wages vary substantially between sectors, with agriculture and trading activities often having the lowest rates. Wage rates also vary between regions and are typically much higher in the region where the capital is located. Wages are especially low in Romania and Bulgaria (around EUR 80 per month for agricultural workers). Women, overall, receive lower wages than men.

The difference is clearly visible in the figure below:



Rural incomes depend heavily on social payments and on paid employment in both the urban and the rural economy. For example, the INEXP group reports that social payments are the main source of income for around one third of rural households in Estonia, Lithuania and Poland.

The position of those who do not have income and have to rely on different social relief programmes is even worse. The following is from a World Bank report on Bulgaria:<sup>10</sup>

*“In the 4 villages covered by the case study, the number of employed within the programme “From Social Relief to employment” run by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy varies from 8 to 24 persons. The majority of these people is married and has 1-2 children. Usually they are the only employed in the family. It is frequent for a 4-member family to have this salary as its only means of support. These people, like many others, buy on credit and have debts of 200-300 BGN; in some households even the daily bread is marked down on credit.”(p. 51).*

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9 Laki László (1999), Falvak – problémák – társadalmi konfliktusok (Villages, problems, social conflicts), in Vidékfejlesztés, vidékpolitika (Rural Development, Rural Policy), Agroinform Kiadóház (pp. 195-216).

10 Survey on Rural Development Needs – Bulgaria, The World Bank, April 2004.

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In a research paper (2002)<sup>11</sup> dealing with the situation in Hungary, Katalin Koncz cites a series of social and economic statistics that show how women bear higher risks and are more threatened by social exclusion and poverty than men. Women may suffer direct disadvantages such as lower wages, more demanding living conditions within the household, a lack of independent source of earnings, or indirect disadvantages that are often the consequences of their greater responsibility for a family in a difficult situation caused by long-term unemployment, a husband's alcoholism etc.

Koncz argues that increased poverty hits women harder than men even within the same families, because the organisation of family life is mainly a woman's task. In general, women do three times more household work than men, and for the active earning women the figure is 6.5 times more household work than their husbands. Another painful social phenomenon is child poverty,<sup>12</sup> which can be taken to impinge upon women more than upon men since it will usually be the woman in the house who is in charge of looking after the children.

Koncz also warns that the flexible forms of employment, which are often recommended for women, pose several problems. The jobs are often discriminatory and provide very low income and minimal security of tenure. Women are first to be dismissed whenever staff reductions are made. It is almost impossible to move from temporary to fixed employment. Another important factor contributing to the higher risk of poverty among women is gender segregation among professions. Women are pushed into the lower hierarchy of professions where the income, promotion, and workplace safety are below average.

Koncz challenges the notion that no difference exists in the level of poverty risk faced by women and men. She demonstrates through analysis of the evidence that, with the exception of single men, the direct poverty risk for women is higher than for men and that in every group, whether classified by economic activity or social composition, women are poorer.

### **Women entrepreneurs in the transition period- some examples**

Ildikó Asztalos Morell has published several papers about the role of women in the socialist agriculture as well as the gender roles of the emerging new family farm enterprises during the transition period. In her latest publication Morell interviewed 30 successful entrepreneurs in the 60 circle around Budapest to explore the ways in which the degree and form of women's participation in the farm enterprise is related to their ability to influence farm decisions.<sup>13</sup>

Asztalos concluded that women's extensive participation in farm labour does not guarantee for them decisive influence (i.e. that one is considered as an equal partner) in farm decisions. .

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11 Koncz Katalin (2002), A társadalmi kirekesztettség és a szegénységkockázat társadalmi nemek szerinti különbségei (Social exclusion and the differences of poverty risk by gender roles), *Esély* 1, szám.

12 See more on the UNICEF webpage Monee project, Social Monitor.

13 Ildikó Asztalos Morell (2005) Gender patterns of off farm/on farm work and control over farm resources in Hungarian farm family enterprises (1989-2002) Presentation on Congress of the European Society for Rural Sociology. Keszthely 2005.

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*“In general terms participation in marketing of products, and by this view over conditions of marketing as well as market contacts showed to be factors of crucial importance for gaining opportunity to participate in control over productive resources on the farm and in the enterprise. Women not engaged in the marketing of products were marginalised in farm decisions. Meanwhile, even the majority of the women who were involved in marketing of products were only exceptionally involved in the contract making process. Instead, they realised the contracts.”*

To gain the increased participation of women in the family farm Asztalos summarised the major factors: “reliability and loyalty due to the kinship bond; know-how (typically administrative or agricultural skills originating from educational background and work-life experience); social skills embedded in local contacts; features originating from the home base of activities: availability and flexibility.” She also adds however that these factors „...at the same time limiting their positions. Their loyal and reliable skills used in supervising the labour force limit their mobility and external contacts; technological know-how is often valued superior to administrative and social know-how for the design and running of the enterprise.”

Asztalos made an interesting comparison on the level of authority between men and women on farm management and decision.

*„Three main dimensions could be named: comprehensive contracts (men) vs. daily affairs (women); formalised external contracts (men) vs. local informal contracts (women) and contracts with dominant organisations (men) vs. contracts with subordinated ones (women). According to Errington’s (1998) ladder of succession, the most central decision areas are those of making payments and investments in capital projects, while decisions concerning the daily functioning of the farm (and staff issues) are on the bottom of this ladder. We can complete this list with decisions concerning transfers to the consumption sphere and the type of consumption goods selected.”*

She also concluded from the interviews that

*„...women can realise their roles as economic actors through the continued support of women from the older generation. These older women, i.e. grandparents manifest total loyalty and identification with the goals and needs of the dominant families of their children. It is the reproductive work of these older women that is the precondition for the younger generation women’s ability to participate in the production and capital accumulation process.”*

Asztalos makes a note to the asymmetric position of men and women in this respect, that

*„Women’s engagement is preconditioned by their ability to resolve the competing demands on their labour power. They have to comply with demands rising from the family’s daily reproduction and those dictated by the priorities of the enterprise. In her closing paragraph she makes two important notes „...the rise of family farms created a new arena, where the outcome of gender*

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*relations cannot be taken for granted.” Nevertheless as concerning even the most balanced farms from gender point of view „...there is a hidden gender agenda, which divides feminine and masculine areas of authority.”*

In another valuable essay about the transition period, Kovács Katalin and Váradi Mónika<sup>14</sup> study the life histories of lower and middle class families, as well as of women in an agricultural town on the Hungarian Great Plain. Their findings in respect of the first group leave little grounds for optimism:

*“What women workers’ lives demonstrate is the fast appearance of an almost closed pauperised working class as the dark side of the emerging capitalism in Hungary. System-change brought disappointment, humiliation, poverty, insecurity and isolation for factory workers...These are the losers in the transition, and not only in a material sense. The values that used to be the cornerstones of their adult lives have been degraded and now they feel insecure.”*

The findings for the second group take us to the realms of smallholders, whose outlook seems more optimistic, even though their position, too, is very precarious. The restructuring and property distribution gave 15-20 per cent of former co-operative members<sup>15</sup> the chance to become smallholders, report the authors. The small amount of property and second-hand machinery that former members<sup>16</sup> could gain or purchase at a low price redressed some of the losses they suffered through transformation. As most of them came from poor peasant stock, successful independent farming, supplemented by service work in agricultural services is regarded as an important move up the social scale.

The study also looks at a third group, consisting of the entrepreneurial class, whose characteristics are largely similar to what Asztalos described in her study. Specifically, the entrepreneurs were market gardeners, where “the women more clearly fulfil a sort of business partner role than in the *tanya* farms.” Garden farming offers a sense of fulfilment and success, and poses no threat to the ‘management’ position of the man, because although the women are significant economic providers, they also accept the role of “home-maker”.

Kovács and Váradi note that in the entrepreneurial group, a shared working partnership exists between men and women, husband and wives.

*“Amongst the gardening women there can be sensed a clear kind of particular professional consciousness, a self-conscious pride in the work which is shared with the men.”*

Even here, however, inequalities persist in family tasks and duties.

*“When their husbands finally collapse in front of the TV, they are still in the kitchen or herding the children towards their beds. They do not usually quarrel or rebel against this habitual division of roles, they feel it would be pointless. The cornerstone of their self-esteem is not the distribution of*

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14 Katalin Kovács – Monika Mária Váradi, *Work, Property and Livelihood: Lower Class Women’s Lives in Rural Hungary*, Central and North-Hungarian Research Institute of the Centre for Regional Studies, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest, Research Report

15 Both women and men.

16 Men only.

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*household tasks but their contribution within the common enterprise and respect for it on the part of the family members.”*

Sawicka's study<sup>17</sup> on the entrepreneurship of women in rural areas in Poland highlights different issues. This study focused more on certain groups of activities and their distribution by region and age than on a qualitative assessment of the involvement of women. Generally, the study found, fewer women than men go for self-employment. On average, every fifth company is run by a woman.

Sawicka compared the different age structure and educational level of women business entrepreneurs and women agricultural entrepreneurs. She found that most businesswomen (74%) were young – between 19 and 45 years, as compared with women farm operators, most of whom are at the retirement age (every fourth farm in Poland is still run by a woman).

*“Business women are also better educated as most of them are at least graduated from a secondary schools, while women in rural areas generally have received only primary education.”*

Of the 720 enterprises surveyed which were run by women on their own or in which women played an operators' role, the largest number, i.e. some 49%, were commercial enterprises (with shops accounting for 32%). In addition to shops, the commercial enterprises consist of wholesale warehouses, and so-called "door-to-door" selling. The predominance of trade is more a reflection of the fact that it is the simplest way of launching a private business, than of a particularly strong demand for consumer goods. This type of activity, Sawicka observes, “neither requires large financial outlays or capital expenditure nor particular qualifications.”

Sawicka's paper also includes a survey of women farm managers, whom she divides into three categories: (i) in 66% of cases, the wife has taken over after the death, illness, or physical disability of her husband. These farms fulfil a social rather than a productive role, and are common among women over retirement age. These farms tend to be, on average, economically weaker than the other two types; (ii) 30% of farms are run by women whose husbands and sons work elsewhere. These farms supplement family income and provide home produced food; (iii) a small remaining number of farms are professionally managed by young women with agricultural qualifications, and are no different from other progressive farms.

She also noted a high degree of mobility in the sector: “Within the 10-year period, nearly half of the women in the survey stopped farming. However, new farms were taken over by other women, so that, at the end of the period, the percentage of farms managed by women was unchanged at about 20%.” She also found that a majority of farms run by women were in decline, and suggested that if the economic climate were favourable, the “productive resources of these declining farms could be released to aid the goals of structural policy.”

A study by Pittlik Timea of a depressed border subregion in Hungary provides different example for rural women's entrepreneurship and employment in mid-

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17 Sawicka j. 2001, The Role of rural women in agriculture and rural development in Poland, Electronic Journal of Polish Agricultural Universities, Economics, Volume 4, Issue 2. Available Online <http://www.ejpau.media.pl/series/volume4/issue2/economics/art-01.html>

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level leadership positions.<sup>18</sup> Pittlik's research began with the assumption that there were fewer opportunities for women in a small town, but just the opposite turned out to be true. Almost every position of leadership was filled by local women: the mayor, the school head, the director of the local welfare office, the managers of the local factories, the manager of the local bank, the director of the health care centre, the head of the post office and the head of the kindergarten. The study found that these management posts were in fact mid-level positions in larger hierarchies. The ultimate bosses were men at a higher level of hierarchy. Further, the women's immediate predecessors were also men who, upon retirement or promotion to a higher level, selected experienced local woman workers to fill their shoes.<sup>19</sup> A common characteristic of these posts held by women is that they were awarded by appointment from above, not by competition. The women concerned always adapted themselves to fit in with existing workplace structures.

The other important finding was that women in positions of leadership in this small rural town did not show any ambition to move up the hierarchy. They considered their appointment a question of personal luck rather than a mark of their talent and ability. They expressed a preference for the traditional role of women in the family, if only their circumstances allowed for it. Although they had adapted to changed circumstances, they still regarded themselves primarily as mothers and wives.

#### **Some assessments of the impact of transition – a CEE overview**

In 1996, FAO WPW became one of first international institutions to publish a study<sup>20</sup> on the situation of rural and agricultural women in 10 transition countries.<sup>21</sup> It was a historical moment, because the impact of the socialist period was still visible. Some institutions from the previous period, which delivered certain social benefits for women, still existed, but the effects of privatisation, the emergence of family agriculture, enterprise development, and so on were also making themselves felt.

The study explored the situation of rural women and compared the results of the 10 CEE countries (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia and Bulgaria) to three reference countries: Austria, Ireland and Finland. The scope of the study was quite broad, taking in women's role in rural areas, on the farm and in the family, their participation in education, training, agricultural services and organizations, as well as household and legal issues and the existence of development projects.

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18 Pittlik Tímea(2000): Női életutak: 'sikeres' nők Sellyén (Women's career path: 'Successful women in Sellye'), in: Településszerkezet, társadalomszerkezet (Settlement structure and social structure) Rendszerváltás és helyi társadalom (Political system change and local society), University Press Pécs, 2000, pp 61-70.

19 Men with management capacities either commuted to larger towns whether they held higher hierarchical positions, or else transferred to agriculture where the seasonal watermelon production provides good income for families.

20 Overview of the socio-economic position of rural women in selected Central and Eastern European countries, FAO 1996, The regional office for Europe and the Women in development Service/Sustainable development Department.

21 The research was coordinated by Pirjo Siiskonen and the Mikkeli Research Institute and Helsinki University and several country experts were involved in the work.

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The research was based on secondary data collected by national experts; no rural women were interviewed. The authors emphasise the rapidly changing character of rural issues and data in these countries, and advise that the results of the comparisons need to be treated with some caution. The aim of the study was to raise awareness of the factors hindering rural women's full participation in, and benefits from, rural development in the region.

The study warns against the simplistic use of "Communist countries" as an all-embracing label. Each country has its own history and culture, and a distinct rural environment. Consequently, "the economic activities and situation of rural women may also vary from area to area."

The study describes several cultural differences expressed through indicators such as the birth rate, family size, infant mortality, average marriage age, life expectancy at birth, and the divorce rate, and compares them to the three reference countries. The study uses the Gender Development Index (GDI)<sup>22</sup> to illustrate the situation of women and men in the project countries, and found that for the early 90s, the Czech Republic and Slovakia scored highest among the CEE countries included in the study. The study shows that ranked by GDI, the situation in gender achievements in all the reference countries is not better than in the CEE countries, as Ireland scores lowest. At the global level, all the project countries and reference countries rank in the top one-third.

The study also confirmed that the role of rural women in public life is weak: "Rural women may become elected to the village board or local government, but they are seldom leaders in public life; most often the role of women is members only." The study makes favourable note of the countries' healthcare and social services and their welfare benefits. "All the countries provide maternity and child support benefits as well as state disability pensions for the rural population. Home care allowance, unemployment benefit and pension on transfer of the farm to a successor are social benefits more rarely encountered in the project countries. Abortion is legalized in all countries except Poland and Ireland" (UN, 1995).

As far as other services are concerned, the deficiencies are more numerous:

*"There are also shortages and differences among different rural areas. The most severe problems in the supply of services are caused by distances, the lack of telephones, transport and adequate roads, and the price of transport as well as of medicine. Lack of birth control facilities in rural areas was also mentioned. The most general shortage is a lack of maternity clinics in some countries."*

In respect of gender equality, the report says:

*"In practice, however, women and men are not equal. The most common inequalities mentioned in both CEE countries and the project's reference countries are: discrimination against women in the labour market;*

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22 "GDI measures inequalities in achievement between women and men. The greater the gender disparity in basic capabilities, the lower a country's GDI compared with its HDI. The indicators used are: share of earned income (percent); life expectancy (years); adult literacy rate (percent); combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrolment ratio (percent); and HDI rank minus GDI rank," UNDP Human Development Report, 1995, New York: Oxford University Press.

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*inequality in attitudes; in the privatization process; in public life; in incomes; in leadership both at work and in politics (also at parliament level); and in the amount of free time. Equality between the sexes is assured by law in principle, not necessarily in practice.”*

The study provides a description of the division of labour by gender in both groups of countries, both on modern and on traditional farms.

*“There are separate activities for men and women, but also activities carried out together...Both women and men participate in decision-making on the farm in the northern countries (the Baltic countries and Poland), but decision-making is done mainly by men in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia and Croatia.”*

The Southern European model received special mention in the study.

*“In the Southern European model, the role of women may be the most demanding, and the working days of rural women are long and heavy... The grip of tradition in daily life is difficult to break, and rural women have no time or possibility for education and training or for organizations and public life.”*

As regards enterprise initiative, the report observes:

*“Entrepreneurship on the farm is quite rare. Yet, in the cases where entrepreneurial activities are found, men are more active than women (data from Croatia, Bulgaria and Hungary), although there is no data on rural women as entrepreneurs.”*

The first years of the new century have given fresh impetus to studies and publications dealing with the social and economic transition of CEE countries and former Soviet Republics. The studies have looked at the situation and position of women in these societies, as well as the similarities and differences among the countries. The production of studies was particularly boosted by the process of EU accession, during which scholars sought to find out as much as possible about the social, economic, political, and family rights and obligations of women in the candidate countries. Almost all these studies are intended to put gender issues on the political agenda.

A World Bank study “Gender in transition”<sup>23</sup> aimed to raise “awareness of the gender implications of the dramatic social and economic changes experienced by these countries during the 1990s.” Covering the territory of the former Soviet Union and Central and Eastern Europe, including Turkey, the report considered gender-based differences in several important areas of the social and economic life of these countries.

The report concludes with “three broad directions for gender responsive policy making in the region:

- strengthening capacity to monitor and evaluate gender differentials;
- addressing existing inequalities in access to economic opportunities; and

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<sup>23</sup> World Bank (2002), Gender in transition, Pierella Paci (ed.), Human Development Unit. Eastern Europe and Central Asia Region.



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- mainstreaming gender in strategies for economic development and poverty reduction.”

Another important study<sup>24</sup> was prepared by the ILO Office in Budapest. This study investigated social security reforms in Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland “through the lens of gender equality.” The study points out that “the motivation to achieve gender equality was not often a force in shaping the reforms; and the gender dimension of major policy changes received relatively little attention, either during national reform deliberations or thereafter. Thus, it is the purpose of the study to reaffirm the importance of equal treatment in social security reform and to bring it into sharper view for public scrutiny.”

The authors draw the following very important conclusion:

*“[W]e must also recognize that social security is not the tool of choice for combating gender inequality in society. The sources of such inequality lie in labour markets, social and family domains, and cultural values, beyond the reach of social security systems. The consequences of unequal treatment can be remediated by social security schemes to some extent... Yet social security alone is a weak instrument for reshaping the entrenched beliefs and practices that sustain unequal treatment of women and men.”*

The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) together with the KARAT Coalition and Network of East West Women/Polska promoted the “Gender and Economic Justice in European Accession and Integration” project. The project evaluates the impact of EU accession on the status of women in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. This project was developed in a framework of human rights, and sought to “address gaps in government compliance with their obligation to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women.” As the study also observes:

*“All CEE countries have ratified the major treaties, including CEDAW, and in the context of fulfilling EU directives, most countries have revised or adopted new national legislation, established national women’s machineries, ombudsmen, or taken other measures to comply with EU standards. Yet in spite of such measures, women’s human rights are far from being fully realized, including in relation to their economic rights.”*

The authors note with regret that certain themes such as the situation of women in rural areas, the situation of the working poor and the situation of women in general could not be encompassed by the report.

The Open Society Foundation – Romania and the Network Women’s Program of the Open Society Institute joined forces to produce “Bringing the EU Home”, a three-year project (2004–2006) of evaluation of the legislative status and effective application of equal opportunities in seven of the ten candidate countries: Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland and Romania.

This project, in concomitance with the previous research and monitoring activities, covers the whole accession period, and measures the headway made by

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24 The Gender Dimensions of Social Security Reform in Central and Eastern Europe: Case Studies of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland Budapest, International Labour Office, 2003 ISBN 92-2-113701-5

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candidate countries in transposing EU Directives on equal opportunities into national law and practice.

A report published in 2005 called “Equal Opportunities for Women and Men” describes the existing national institutional mechanisms, policies and programmes for gender equality. It considers the general lack of awareness among women and men how the inequalities affect their everyday life. The authors of the report also point to the lack of political will to enforce existing national and EU gender equality policies. The report contains recommendations to national governments and EU officials, and its authors have promised on-going updates that will be published on the Web.

These studies provide a panoramic view of gender issues in CEE and CIS countries. The studies we have mentioned, along with several other research papers, case studies and national reports, all indicate that although the themes are well recognised, equal opportunities and gender issues are only very reluctantly included in the main political discourse. Meanwhile, the rural dimension is not only absent from the political agenda, but is also neglected even in research papers.

### **Masculin dominance – equal opportunities and better social order**

The principle of equal opportunities has been legally adopted and institutionalised in CEE countries since 2000. As of May 2004, pre-accession funds and the Structural Funds tried to enforce the principle by providing support only for those projects that pay attention to the role of women. Other specific programmes to improve the situation of women are also available, but it will probably take one or two EU programming periods (14 years) before their impact is felt. The vision from the nineties that the XXI century will be the century of women is still takes time to be achieved.

In spite of these generous ideas and principles the everyday approach is not very often challenged by the usual masculine way of thinking and dominance. Mainly the feminists raise voice and show up us a mirror how often we overlook on the real situation of women and how reluctant we are to think differently. Adamik Mária, a feminist researcher selected a ballad to reflect the everyday blindness concerning the equal opportunity and equal treatment principle. The essence of the ballad of Kőműves Kelemen is known in Central Europe in different national context. The drama of the ballad is about builders who cannot complete the castle of Déva, because the walls what they build daytime falls apart at night. The solution to keep the walls erected is to kill the wife who is to be earliest to visit her husband at work. To put her body into the wall would save the work of the builders. The man whose wife arrives earlier called Kőműves (Builder) Kelemen.

Adamik translates this drama to recent social discourse:

“Kőműves Kelemen and his apprentices do not discuss it with the wife of Kelemen whether or not the Castle of Déva is a ‘common good’ and what should be done in case it collapses overnight. They discuss it with each other and with the ‘Power’ that makes them build the castle. This is the reason why there has never been a concept of any other ‘common good’, any other direction of social development, which would attach the highest value to the solidarity and consensus between Kelemen and his wife. According to such a concept the two of them together would say ‘no’ to the ‘Power’, which wants to have the castle constructed.

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Naive as this archaic thesis might sound, it is revelatory. It shows, for example, that had the story happened in the other way round (the wife of Kelemen, what is more: many unknown wives of Kelemens are cooperating with the 'Power', so the Kelemens are built into the wall), it would not make us any happier. I would go one step further: it is not at all comforting that a few 'privileged' wives have already been given the trowel – as the result of the centuries-long economic development, and to calm down the misunderstood and misused struggle for equal opportunities.”

She further discusses the nature of masculin power in society, the characteristics of women- men power relations and the adjustment process of women to masculin power in different situations.

„Instead of using women in the debate on 'how much' state and 'how much' market is appropriate (the bad, old liberal/socialist debate), the question should be put in a radically different way: what type of state and what type of market do we need? We could go even one step further and ask: what sort of human relations, especially woman-man relations are rewarded and punished by the state and the market we have chosen? What quality rights do we promote instead of mechanically repeated and abstract citizenship and human rights?” Her questions referring to different values and social order could be guiding principles in actual social and political debates in every CEE and CIS countries.

If the political will were there, several of these equality issues such as the wage gap, the glass ceiling, low female representation in public life, the discounting of women's 'second shift' in household, could be rapidly solved. Other problems may take longer, because they relate to various different sections of society.

Before proposing solutions, we need to be clear about some of the issues at stake. In the first place, equal opportunities and gender discrimination are not woman-only concerns. Both men and women should be involved in the hunt for a solution. Secondly, equality will not come about spontaneously. It will require serious concerted action in a wide range of areas and active programmes rather than mere campaigns. Thirdly, although technical innovation may bring some benefits, it does not in itself directly influence human relations.

Without repeating several other proposals and initiations I can propose the following actions.

- Men and women must be educated and enlightened about the unequal status of women, and made to feel personally responsible for it and its effects;
- A root-and-branch awareness programme should be implemented to highlight inequalities, abuse, crimes, violence and human trafficking, and people made aware of the victims and the consequences of violence within families;
- Gender issues should be made part and parcel of mainstream political discourse;
- Tougher enforcement of the equal opportunity principle is required.

### **Summary**

The arrival of the market economy and democracy created a special contradiction. People wanted to have democratic societies and a market economy, but were not prepared for its rules and mechanisms. After 15-16 years of democratic change,

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many people still feel they are losers in the social transformation and cannot adjust their lives to new circumstances.

We looked at the features and major trends of structural changes in agriculture and rural employment in CEE countries. We also referred to a number of international studies dealing with gender and the social consequences of economic transition. With a view to providing some insight into the everyday life of rural women, the paper also looks at the changing role of rural women entrepreneurs. The paper touches upon the theme of rural employment, and makes a comparative review of living standards in the countries under scrutiny. It concludes with an appeal for a better social order providing women with equal opportunities.