

Women, Integration and Prison: An Analysis of the Processes of Socio-Labor Integration of Women After Prison in Europe

**National Report
Hungary**

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Introduction

There are two important elements of the Hungarian context that have decisively shaped the MIP research on the reintegration of women prisoners after release: the lack of previous policy research on this topic, and the ongoing transformation of the institutional setting. Both enabled and encouraged the research.

The availability of relevant, policy-focused research both on reintegration after prison, as well as research on women prisoners was extremely limited. The few important studies on prisons and prisoners in the 1990-ies were sociologically focused and offered some data and insight into prison life, however, these were exclusively or largely based on men's prisons and did not address reintegration¹. Finally in 2001, the first study on women prisoners² was published, which offered basic data on women prisoners, and also on the three penitentiary facilities³ for women inmates in Hungary – and drew attention for the first time to the relevance of domestic violence in the lives of women prisoners. The other important research that provided the basis for our research as a source of secondary data, was a major study accomplished by the Hungarian Helsinki Committee⁴ during their Prison Monitoring Program. Their book was published in 2002 with rich survey data on legislation and aspects of prison life that featured as important for reintegration, e.g. on work and education in prisons. We will frequently refer to these few but important sources throughout our report. Yet, given our national context, the Hungarian report relies largely on interview data both with the women⁵ and with the agents⁶, as well as on other data collected during fieldwork.

The MIP research was carried out at a time when the institutional setting was characterised by significant transformations. The single most decisive institutional change was marked in July 2003 by the set-up of the Probation Officers' Service (POS). Formerly, probation officers (for adult convicts) worked at the County Courts, while probation officers for under-age convicts worked in yet another organisational arrangement. With the creation of a national organisation, the institutionalisation and professionalisation of their work, and the importance of reintegration was emphasised. The institutional change followed and reflected a change in legislation: e.g. in giving more authority to probation officers already at the courtrooms. Legislation concerning

¹László Huszár: "...és bűnhődés: A magyar börtönlakók szociológiai vizsgálata", *Kandidátusi értekezés*, 1997.

Dr. Póczik Szilveszter: "Magyar és cigány bűnelkövetők a börtönben – egy kutatás tapasztalatai", *Kutatási beszámoló és munkaanyag*, Országos Kriminológiai Intézet, Budapest, 1999.

²Lenke Fehér and Parti Katalin "Nők a börtönben", *Kriminológiai Tanulmányok* 39, 2002.

³Our research included all three sites: Eger, Kalocsa and Mélykút. The report includes frequent references to all sites.

⁴András Kádár, Kőszeg Ferenc (eds.), *Double Standard: Prison Conditions in Hungary*, Hungarian Helsinki Committee, Budapest, 2002

⁵In the three women's facilities we interviewed 20 women prior to their release, and we managed to follow-up 17 of them 4-6 weeks later for a second interview, and about 4 months after release for a third interview. About 9 months after release we interviewed 15 of the women for the fourth time.

⁶Interviews were conducted with 27 agents (during 22 interviews) and included penitentiary wards, educators, a prison psychologist, managers of women's units, department leaders at the NPA, executives at NPA, a penitentiary judge, executives at the Probation Officers' Service, and several NGO-s.

penitentiaries was also put on the agenda, since the Penitentiary Decree from 1979⁷ became increasingly obsolete. The draft bill is currently being discussed by experts – but it has not been passed and certainly has not been implemented yet, thus it will not be discussed in our report.

The internal changes in the National Penitentiary Administration (NPA) or in various penitentiary institutes received less attention and remained less visible. Our research noted a gradual opening up towards NGO-s, (also towards the media), co-operation with other European penitentiaries and internal differentiation between institutes started to emerge from the once homogenous image. With Hungary's recent membership in the European Union, access to structural funds has opened up new resources. These resources are available above all for partnerships – another motivation for opening up and co-operation.

Both of the above factors made our research especially relevant. Both the NPA and the women's facilities were supportive of the research and expressed an interest in using its future results. The recently formed Probation Officers's Service (POS) was especially open to receive any research findings on reintegration of ex-inmates, since they lacked previous measurement or feedback. The few NGO-s active in reintegration were eager to share their experiences with us. However, the frequent changes and lack of institutionalised solutions also meant that state agencies had little ready data on the cost or efficiency of measures – as a matter of fact, were at best working towards setting up systems (e.g. centralised computer systems, registration systems, etc).

The MIP project was launched under a theoretical framework which built on a very complex understanding of social exclusion in regards to women ex-prisoners. This framework took into account economic, political, cultural characteristics as well as penal characteristics in its approach to social exclusion – while gender certainly was regarded as a key factor to understanding social exclusion of women (ex)prisoners. The MIP research aimed to improve our understanding on the specific factors and patterns most characteristic to the primary exclusion of women prisoners in the given countries, as well as to the prison's contribution to furthering social exclusion or potentially, to the enabling of some women's integration. Throughout the research, the potential links between the various forms of exclusion were addressed as well. Thus instead of asking how the prison impacts women's opportunities for integration after release, the MIP research aimed at understanding how the prison impacts differently various groups of women, depending, especially on their primary level of exclusion. Chapter one introduces the patterns of primary exclusion identified among women prisoners. The research findings on prison's contribution to social exclusion/ integration are summarised in chapter two and three. Chapter four summarises research findings regarding women's life after release. The various chapters start with the introduction of the corresponding, main research hypothesis developed on the basis of the theoretical framework of the MIP project.

⁷ Throughout the report we will refer to the two decrees that constitute currently the basis of the operation of penitentiaries: 1979/11. Law-Level Decree (referred to as Penitentiary Code) and 1996/ 6. Regulation of the Minister of Justice (referred to as Penitentiary Rules).

I. Primary exclusion

Hypothesis 1. Many women in prison were already suffering a degree of social exclusion at the time of their imprisonment.

A look at the characteristics of Hungarian women prisoners immediately reveals that it is a group which suffers from severe disadvantages according to all conventional measures of primary social exclusion, including but not limited to their level of education, economic and employment data, number of children, ethnicity and other factors⁸. This chapter aims to reveal specific patterns in which the interconnectedness of these various factors reveals itself, so that a better understanding of the ‘production’ of social exclusion becomes possible.

Despite the fact that the group of women who participated in the research suffer from multiple disadvantages, just as the general population of women prisoners do⁹, there are important differences among certain groups of women in the degree and type of exclusion suffered prior to their imprisonment. We found that one group of women especially suffered from a combination of several exclusionary factors leading to a criminal career – to whose path we will refer to as **“excluded into crime”**. Other women on the other hand, led lives partly and often fully integrated into society’s key social institutions. This is especially true for women who killed their partners as a result of years of domestic violence: to this pattern we refer as **“interrupted by violence”**. And last, but not least, it is possible to identify a pattern among the women in whose case **“crime as ‘choice’”** appears, rather than an inescapable reality in the given life situations.

1. Excluded Into Crime: The Criminal Careers of “Roma Mothers”

All recidivists in our research sample are Roma women and nearly all Roma women are recidivists, usually sentenced for theft – while all non-Roma women are first offenders in our sample. In other words, in our small sample¹⁰ there seems to be a rather straightforward relationship between having a criminal career as a woman and belonging to the Roma ethnicity. Unfortunately we could not investigate in this research the selection mechanisms at work in various institutions and processes of the Hungarian criminal justice system, thus we cannot establish how this result is produced. However,

⁸ Compared to many other European countries, the role of drugs and drug addiction is marginal in these women’s lives generally, and also in our research sample.

⁹Our sample mirrors the characteristics of the women prisoners’ population, although it cannot be considered representative due to its size (20 women).

¹⁰Ten of the 20 women in our research were Roma according to the women’s declarations as well as researchers’ judgement. Due to current regulations on data protection, there is no official data on the number of Roma inmates in Hungarian prisons. Surveys based on self-definition of inmates found that about 40% of the prison population are Roma, prison directors give much higher estimates, on average 61%. Especially in the case of women, it is a broadly held opinion that the overwhelming majority of women inmates are Roma, while researchers found almost no difference between the ratio of Roma among men and women inmates based on self-identification. (in László Huszár, “Romák, börtönök, statisztikák”, Amaro Drom, 1997 August, pp. 9-11.)

we have certainly no reason to think that it is only the Roma women who repeatedly commit thefts – yet it is them who repeatedly get back to prison for such crimes.

By following the critical moments and deprivations in the life of the women, we will argue, that due to the multiple disadvantages present in their life, and the role of responsible motherhood, these women were left with no alternatives to petty crime. Violent, irresponsible or absent partners and repeated imprisonment only further narrowed their options. Even though we do not want to suggest a general connection between Roma women in prison, criminal careers, and motherhood - for the analysis, we will refer to this pattern as that of “Roma mothers”. Yet it must be noted that in reality there are non-Roma women whose life paths would belong to this pattern while other Roma women would have very different developments in their lives.

Lack of educational qualifications and lack of professional qualifications are a common problem among the Roma women in prison¹¹. As we learnt, this goes back to limited access to school or other serious barriers to schooling in early childhood, often influenced by the family environment or by the break in family ties and the move to state care. In a number of accounts the role of gender is very explicitly stated in the early interruption of school.

My mother died when I was thirteen years old. She hanged herself at home and I was the one who found her. I was raised by my grandmother until I was eight, then I was with my parents, afterwards I returned to my grandmother's. At the age of fifteen I left for good. But until I left I had to help out with the laundry, cooking, cleaning. I never liked going to school. I was a poor student, because no one paid enough attention to me, neither at home nor at school. (M2)

Early pregnancies and looking after children certainly played an important role in most women's life – in fact, all Roma women in our research had children, a few of them as many as 5 or 6 children. As we shall see throughout the report, the importance of motherhood has been a constantly recurring theme in the women's accounts.

I got married at fifteen, right after leaving the state care facilities, and had a baby when I was sixteen. (K8)

Interrupting school not only means the start of motherhood, but also the start of not only domestic work in a separate household, but often paid working life outside the family. The official employment records of women in this group were often very limited, if not fully missing, while all of them worked either in unregistered seasonal/ temporary jobs or in the household. Many women said that they would not be able to get proper jobs without any qualifications.

¹¹ Even though many women prisoners have a poor educational background, (about 2/3 of them do not reach above the level of elementary school), our research seems to support the view that Roma women prisoners are especially disadvantaged. Only 2 of the 10 women had some vocational training, the majority had not completed elementary school.

I was a day-labourer for years, whenever there was work available. In addition to that I also cleaned houses. There is nothing else I would be able to do. (K1)

For many women periods of employment alternated with periods of unemployment and often, with times of childbirth. Unemployment was not always registered. Apart from the income from the often insecure and temporary jobs or unemployment benefit, many women collected child benefits or maternity benefits from the state. However, these benefits were hardly sufficient to cover for the family's needs – most often they were one of the several sources of income. Welfare payments thus represented one type of income in a diversified range of sources.

In their narratives crime often emerges as a rather natural and factual necessity if one has to feed the family. In fact, stealing in order to feed the children is proof of good motherhood insofar children are thus not taken into state care:

I was on parental welfare, I was getting child benefits and child-raising supplements, and I earned some money cleaning houses. I also cleaned for the prosecutor of my earlier criminal case. When I ran out of money I went to steal for the children. I took care of my kids, that's why they were not placed into state care. (K6)

The family environment often played a part in the emerging criminal careers of the women. For many of the women, several family members and spouses have been to prison. The role of spouses/ partners in the crime was sometimes explicitly stated, either referring to the men's failure to bring home income, or to him being responsible for the design of the criminal act.

Yes, my husband did play a role in this crime. My husband did not bring home any money. He was working for a year, but he had to pay child support to his other family, so his whole salary was taken, plus he spent it on playing video-games/slot machines. I stole because of him. (K6)

These women were incarcerated for theft in the overwhelming majority of cases, and as mentioned earlier, most of them were recidivists. Earlier prison sentences in some cases contributed to further splits in their lives and resulted in further exclusion.

2. Interrupted by Violence: The Path of Domestic Violence Victims to Prison.

The only recent research in Hungary that targeted women inmates indicated the massive role of domestic violence in the lives of the 100 interviewed women.¹² A topic, which until a few years ago was considered to be a taboo in Hungary, is now increasingly

¹²Researchers found that about 1/3 of the interviewed women imprisoned for homicide or severe physical abuse, suffered regular abuse as a child. In 60% of the cases the target of the crime (homicide or severe physical abuse) was their husband or partner. About 50% of these women described regular physical abuse by their partner during the year or years prior to the crime. (In: Dr. Lenke Fehér, dr. Parti Katalin, "Nők a börtönben", in *Kriminológiai Tanulmányok*, 2002.)

present in public discourse. In line with the entry of the topic into such discourses, we found that most of the agents interviewed – especially those at higher levels in the penitentiary hierarchy – showed some awareness about the frequency of domestic violence victims among the women convicted for homicide and manslaughter¹³.

We will now focus on the potential links between domestic violence and social exclusion. We will argue that many women led socially rather integrated lives prior to the start of the often daily violence in their lives, yet domestic violence in itself became a factor that led to several forms of exclusion – already prior to the criminal incident. We will also argue that analysing the impact of domestic violence on the lives of women both prior to the crime, in the criminal procedure, inside prison and after release, will reveal that being convicted and imprisoned for them causes an ‘interruption’ of all prior integration in their lives, and a loss of social status hardly recoverable.

It is a well-known fact from the literature on domestic violence that it cuts across social classes, status groups, etc. and may appear in families with very different social backgrounds and positions¹⁴. In our research we found that the three women imprisoned because of homicide related to domestic violence, had led more or less socially integrated lives prior to the occurrence of domestic violence. That is, they possessed some educational qualifications, had permanent employment for a significant part of their lives, good relationships with their families (including their children) and communities. However, due to domestic violence, they had to face isolation and losses that can be linked to the concept of social exclusion. Illustrating these effects is not only helpful for their cases, but is also relevant for several other women’s experiences, who were imprisoned for other crimes (theft, robbery) and yet had been victims of domestic violence as well. The battering and abuse in all cases lasted for years, with various but often escalating intensity and included usually physical, sexual, verbal and emotional terror and often targeted several family members:

This relationship with my partner was the biggest mistake of my life, the worst decision I ever made. We met and had two children, and then all hell broke loose: he constantly pounded on me. That’s how I got this scar on my lips. I suffered a great deal. (K7)

Isolation of the woman from her friends, her family members and other social contacts is very common by the batterer. Also her forced withdrawal from the workplace referring to her maternal responsibilities or to jealousy, is also frequent. These acts contribute to her loss of social contacts, independent income, sense of achievement and autonomy.

My husband completely isolated me, we did not have friends at all. I had several jobs after finishing college, I was a pay-roll division supervisor at a company and I also worked at the college. Later on my husband did not want me to work, as he

¹³About 18% of the women prisoners (2003.07.07), that is, 190 women were in prison due to homicide in Hungary. Three of the four women who were imprisoned for homicide in our sample, were imprisoned due to murdering (or attempting to murder) a violent man in their family.

¹⁴ Krisztina Morvai, *Terror a családban*, Kossuth Kiadó, 1998.

would provide for us. Then for a while I worked at my husband's gas station and his car shop, but I couldn't stand that. After my daughter was born I stayed at home as a real sacrificing mother would. (K10)

The combined effects of isolation, various forms of abuse, loss of self-esteem and sometimes income, often resulted in a forced dependence on the batterer. Yet, the once powerful concept of “learned helplessness” must be challenged, since many of the women victims actually sought support and tried to ask for help and leave their batterers.

When I called the police that my father was beating my mother and intimidating the whole family and that I was there with my one-year old daughter, the response of the police officer was that, 'When there is trouble at home I don't call the Nõk Lapja [a women's weekly], deal with it yourself'! (E1)

I didn't dare report him to the police, the family didn't even know and they wouldn't have been able to help either. This is all so personal that one doesn't want to make it public. But I just couldn't handle it any longer and I shared everything with a psychologist. I also told the psychologist that I wasn't able to stand it anymore, so I was told to take sedatives. (K9)

The responsibility of the police and other agents for not acting on such calls – as long as there is “no blood” - is especially striking, knowing that these resulted in murders or murder attempts. The fact that domestic violence is a taboo, also influenced the criminal proceedings and the court decision in several, often ambiguous ways. The women admitted the homicide of their father and husband respectively and were released immediately after their police testimonies for the entire court procedure – a sign that the cases were considered straightforward and the women representing no threat to society. However, according to the women, domestic violence was not taken into consideration in the court decisions.¹⁵

The stigma of being a murderer of one's father or husband is especially powerful and led to further losses caused by domestic violence:

This was a small town, word got around really fast despite us having moved to another house. My child was not accepted to kindergarten even though there were four different ones around. They asked her where her mother was. They wanted to take out their need for revenge on the children even though they had nothing to do with it. The whole family moved to another town. But people might also find out there so we would like to move further away. (E1)

During imprisonment, women continued to suffer new losses due to domestic violence, e.g. some lost their property, and others lost all contact with their children, due to the

¹⁵ Since this research did not address the judicial procedure, we cannot evaluate this claim. However, the women who suffered domestic violence, expressed more dissatisfaction or feelings of injustice with court procedure than other women did in this research.

former batterer's decision.¹⁶ Very important special losses and threats included homelessness or renewed physical danger after prison¹⁷:

I can't go back to the house, regardless of the fact that half of it is mine, because I know that since he had abused me so much I couldn't live with him any longer. I am afraid that he will blackmail me with the children, that I will be able to see them only if I comply – he never once let them visit me in prison. And I am afraid he wants to start over, even after the attempted murder! (K10)

In summary, domestic violence in these women's lives often led them from a partly or fully integrated position into homelessness, propertylessness and joblessness. The (potential) loss of children is especially dramatic if we consider that these women continued to comply with gender roles regarding marriage, heterosexuality and maternity.

3. Crime as 'choice': Independent and subversive women

The few women in this pattern¹⁸ exhibited a strong degree of autonomy and independence in their lives – which often led to rather 'subversive' behaviours, behaviours that ran counter to accepted social norms, especially, gender-related norms in Hungarian society. The women in this pattern, even if some of them suffered from poverty, did not come from marginalized families – many grew up in two-parent families and described a happy childhood. In fact, the two women whose life is perhaps the closest to the ideal type of this pattern, came from middle class families and had educated parents, a fashion designer, university teacher, or public prosecutor. Most of the women acquired middle level educational qualifications. Regardless of their age, they all believed that they should continue studying:

I have completed my grammar school education, I also have an intermediate level certificate in storage management, as well as basic education in library science and a certificate in office management and computer operations. I studied playing the piano for eight years, which later on I taught as a second job. I was not accepted to university, to the faculty of mechanical engineering, but I don't mind that. I am still interested in new things. Acquiring a little knowledge never hurts anybody. (K4)

They all had a series of jobs from an early age and put an emphasis on making their own lives. Experimenting sometimes included travelling abroad at a young age to work or with no particular plans. Most women held permanent jobs, however, still many encountered financial problems. This was named as the main reason for the thefts or intellectual crimes they got involved in. However, it must be noted that these women had

¹⁶ The report will return to losses connected to children in chapter two.

¹⁷ Currently there is no help for the victims of domestic violence in Hungarian prisons, while many of them have very little contacts and visitors, suffer from law suits, complicated if not lost family relationship, and traumas related to domestic violence etc. Even if some agents talked with empathy about the victims of domestic violence, this was not translated into pragmatic help, therapy, counselling etc. Other agents showed no awareness about domestic violence.

¹⁸ Six of the 20 women in the research were considered to belong to this pattern.

experienced a significantly lesser degree of poverty and exclusion than the 'Roma mothers', but potentially had different expectations due to their middle class family environments. Their criminal careers either included a range of various criminal offences, (e.g. theft and forgery), or white-collar crime (computer fraud or embezzlement) committed over a lengthy period of time. They all expressed full responsibility for their crime, which they committed by themselves – thus financial or emotional dependence on a man has not been an issue in their crime case, and neither has domestic violence. They all served their first prison sentences. Many talked about their motivation and regret, but were also very critical about the injustice suffered during the criminal procedure, as well as about prison conditions and possible violation of rights. Several women considered the idea of launching a NGO in order to support women ex-prisoners.

After their release from prison, a few women explicitly referred to the importance of excitement that was linked to their earlier life-style – and explained their concern regarding the future.

This is an average, mundane life, nothing special, it is boring and monotonous. We get up, we wash, cook and clean. I can't wait for summer so I can go places, to the beach for example. I used to live a high-society life, I miss that. Not that I am tempted but I still miss it. But I'll get used to this, this is good, this is the way it has to be done. (K3)

The lifestyle and behaviours of many of these women did not conform to the gender-roles and behaviours expected from women. Travelling and working alone abroad for years has not been in line with the ideal of womanhood – and, pursuing a criminal career is certainly not among the socially accepted options for women. As we saw, these women designed and performed their criminal acts by themselves, neither indirectly (through domestic violence) or directly under the influence of men, and often not due to the lack of other options either. Therefore, the term 'crime by choice' can be applied, even though it does not indicate that all of their actions were fully conscious and calculated based on rational choice. This alone is rather subversive, however, considering their relationship to topics rather central to 'conventional' values as marriage, children and heterosexuality, further evidence support their subversiveness.

I am happy about how my life turned out – with no husband. I had a schedule and a lifestyle that suited me and I lived my own life. Then I realised that years had passed and I didn't even want to get married any longer. I would also like to keep my independence in my current relationship, though I have been together with my partner for nine years now. I only dropped him a note saying that I would be away for a while, he didn't even know I had been convicted. He was not aware of the crime I had committed, that was all done by me. (K4)

Yet, even in their case, their children occupied a central place in their concerns for the future. The few women who left their children in the care of their mothers while they went on trips, talked at length about their guilt and drew up plans for becoming decent mothers – yet in other cases felt that motherhood perhaps was not their call in life.

II. The prison's contribution to exclusion

Hypothesis 2. Imprisonment excludes women who were not socially excluded before their imprisonment and excludes already-excluded women still further.

Motherhood and social contacts

One of the sub-hypothesis of the MIP research has been that imprisoned women suffer an irrecoverable loss of roots, and their relationships to their children is especially damaged. Thus, in this chapter research findings regarding women's relationship to their children and other family members are introduced. Based on the analysis presented in hypothesis 1., it can be concluded that motherhood has been repeatedly stressed as a dominant life theme by the great majority of the women, regardless of age, educational background, ethnicity, or crime committed. Motherhood emerged also as one of the central issues of concern in the women's narratives about prison life and its consequences. However, in terms of the strategies developed, we found very significant variations. On the one hand, some women very consciously tried to maintain contact with their children in all available forms – while others developed distancing strategies through which they believed it would be easier for the children to put up with the absence of their mothers.

I talk to my children on the phone every day for 15 minutes. The family has also visited me, the children, my husband, my brother-in-law as well as our best man. (K6)

To me family means only my child, not even my husband. This word to me means nothing but my child. Yet being in prison puts a distance between my daughter and I. During the first couple of months I didn't even call her so she would be able to forget me a little. When she first came for a visit she didn't even touch me, she just stayed with her father. I am not sure whether she recognised me. (K7)

Special difficulties emerged concerning what to tell the children of those mothers who were imprisoned due to homicide of a family member or murder attempt. In some cases, the surviving batterer punished the mother by not allowing any contact with her children for years. Another kind of difficulty emerged for women serving long sentences in maintaining real communication instead of formal visits. Being banned from children, or ignored by them is extremely painful for the few women in such a situation – and is surely the largest source of misery in their accounts. Suicide thoughts and nervous breakdowns are directly linked to this pain.

My children don't usually visit me, they are angry that I am in prison. I really have no one [crying]. I was so bent out of shape two months ago, I almost committed suicide. (E2)

Most women were left without a partner's active support, due to a number of different reasons. While some women were without a partner at the time of imprisonment, a few relationships broke up due to the prison – either because the women decided it was better

not to tell the partner, or because the men decided not to wait for them. In yet other cases, the men were formally there, however, the women did not expect much from their partners. A few women started new 'relationships' while in prison, based on one or two meetings with a man in prison and the correspondence that followed. Overall, only a few of the women enjoyed the continuing support of a partner. While most women adopted a rather pragmatic view about husbands and spouses, all great losses, ruptures, guilt feelings and major emotional struggles were associated above all with worries about children. This certainly supports the view that imprisoned women are especially influenced by the potential rupture of ties with their children.

In fact, for most women, the most stable form of family support was provided by their parents. Many women stressed that family relationships were maintained in their original intensity or actually became stronger due to imprisonment. Overall, an opinion shared by many women can be summarised as follows:

I haven't felt any distance from my family members and friends. 'Those who love me, will love me no matter what.' (M22)

Yet, less than half of the women had regular visits¹⁹. A key reason for lack of visitors had been damaged family relationships or feelings of shame. In addition, many women were very considerate in determining how often invitations for visits should be sent, as visits were often very burdensome for family members. Quite a few women believed that visits required such a sacrifice from family members, that they cannot require from them.

My parents and son visit me every three months from Tiszaföldvár. The reason that they come so seldom is because of the lack of money and that there is no one to drive. (M15)

Distance had caused such difficulties that in fact it was the first and foremost reason for request for transfer to another penitentiary. Due to permanent overcrowding, such requests were routinely refused, but when granted, meant a tangible improvement in maintaining contact with family. The application of LER²⁰ also carried the same advantages and was very much appreciated by the few women who benefited from it.

I am on LER and I have the prison to thank for this. This is designed to help find employment, to spend more time with family and not to lose touch with the outside

¹⁹ As stated in § 36. of the Prison Administration Law, prisoners are entitled to at least monthly visits. The same paragraph declares that prisoners are entitled to correspondence with their relatives and other specified persons to be approved by the prison director. The frequency and length of letters is not limited. Letters can be opened and checked for security reasons. Usage of the telephone is allowed in line with the actual conditions and facilities of the prison itself.

²⁰ LER (Lenient Executive Rule) is a progressive measure which allows for visits home and several other advantages. The so-called Lenient Executive Rules offer the biggest freedom and flexibility to those prisoners who have already served half of their sentence, behave well, thus it is believed that the objective of the penalty can be reached with lighter measures as well. (high-security prisons excluded). If on LER, the prisoner can leave the prison four times a month for short leaves, can work outside the prison without supervision and is entitled to get the earned money in cash.

world. So I can get hold of everything I need. This means 30 hours of leave every month including travel time. In addition, I can go into the city for four hours on Saturday once a month when my family members come for a visit. (E1)

Most women were not allowed on any visits home during their imprisonment which often lasted for years. The only real exception to this were the women on LER, as mentioned above. Apart from this short leaves for home were extremely rare and were limited to those cases where the law explicitly had to be applied. Funerals of family members were such exceptions, although not even these leaves were automatic. Some women felt that access to leaves for home is only given to those who develop special relationships or deliver special services or information to prison personnel.

I didn't get any leave, this is usually given to those who spy and report. This is very typical of this place, those few people can ho home often, they are moved to lower security regimes, they have good jobs. Many people would do anything for these privileges. (K5)

Women who serve long sentences are especially at risk of loosing family ties. These women are moved to a so-called transition group²¹ a few years prior to the end of sentence – and are allowed for visits to ease the ‘transition’. These first visits home were very dramatic for the women, yet indeed helped prepare their eventual release. Agents appraised both LER and transition groups very positively, and in general, were in favour of extending such measures to larger groups of inmates, and were concerned about potential restrictions.

In summary, women prisoners’ outside contacts in many cases were weak and weakened further during the imprisonment, for a variety of reasons. These reasons were often not directly linked to the negative influence of the prison itself, but to larger social phenomena often carrying a ‘gendered’ characteristics, e.g. women’s feeling of shame due to crime, isolation and other consequences of domestic violence, or lack of work contacts. Yet, the prison itself contributed to these problems in at least two ways. Firstly, through the difficulties of physical access to visitors, secondly, through the limited and presumably selective application of existing measures, such as short leaves or LER.

The consequences of women’s prisons and prisoners’ small weight in the prison system

The few number of women’s prisons has important consequences for women inmates’ life in prison – one of which, their often large distances from home was already mentioned above, yet is most tangible in the case of the Kalocsa prison. Kalocsa, the largest facility, and the only one which is an independent women’s prison, is the only high-security prison for women – yet it also accommodates women convicted to mid-

²¹ Those who serve long sentences and have already served 5 years, should be moved 2 years prior to their release to a so-called transition group. In a transition group – as defined by §. 29 of the Prison Administration Law - prisoners enjoy a higher degree of freedom in moving around the prison, may work outside the prison and meet the probation officer regularly.

security prison²². This means that many of the inmates serve relatively long sentences and may come from any part of Hungary. Through its unfavourable location in the South of the country and due to a Budapest-centred railway system, from many locations it is impossible to get to Kalocsa and home within a day – and it is also costly. No wonder that quite a few women did not want their families to undertake such excursions – and were left without visits. Their leaves for home were constrained by exactly the same problem, also for the financial means and the time it requires. This together with the perception that women serving longer sentences may be more risky to be allowed for a leave, dramatically limits their access to leaves. Agents are aware of this issue, however so far no real solution has been identified for this problem.

The Kalocsa prison also suffers heavily from overcrowding²³, which according to the agents is the first and foremost reason for lack of sport activities, visiting room, and it limits possibilities for educational and free-time activities. Living conditions are inappropriate, and even maintaining the old building is a day to day fight due to tight budgets as described by the agents. Interviewed women were painfully aware²⁴ of the damage they suffered from the lack of even basic sport facilities, or any privacy in the often very large cells (up to 20-24 women). Thus conditions in the Kalocsa prison are hardly suitable for giving appropriate, reintegration-oriented support for women inmates.

The Mélykút facility which houses all under-age women imprisoned in Hungary and is also the only facility for adult women with a low-security sentence²⁵, has also very significant access problems. While it is closer to Budapest, it also has very unfavourable conditions, since it is located in the middle of a field. Mélykút cannot be reached by public transportation, it requires kilometres of walking from visitors who do not own a car. Yet, even more importantly perhaps, its location entirely contradicts the objective of a low-security regime: more access to outside contacts, work outside the prison, altogether, less penalty and more integration. Not only visitors and work, but also access for NGO-s is problematic. The Mélykút facility is fully unsuitable for the purposes of both a low-security regime and that of a facility for young women. It must be noted however, that inmates enjoyed the benefits of a smaller facility, the freedom of access to garden, fresh air, outdoor sport facilities and supportive climate created by prison personnel despite the conditions.

The third facility, Eger is the only women's prison with favourable access conditions. It is situated in the centre of Eger, a small town in the Northeast which can be reached by various means of public transport. Moreover, most women inmates of the prison come

²² From the approx. 400 women inmates in Kalocsa, about 155 are convicted for high-security prison (mainly for homicide or attempted homicide), all others in Kalocsa serve a sentence in a medium-security prison.

²³ “The prison's capacity is 240 people, however, our current roll is more than 400.” (A1)

²⁴ Lack of sport activities was mentioned as a major problem by each and every woman we interviewed.

²⁵ There are only about 5 under-age women imprisoned here. From the adult women in Mélykút, about 150 serve a medium-security sentence, and about 85 either a low-security sentence or an earlier, unpaid fee sentence turned into imprisonment. The Mélykút facility with about 260 women belongs organizationally to the Pálhalma prison with its 1580 men, totaling around 1840 inmates and is one of the largest facilities in Hungary.

from the north-east region of Hungary, and thus are the only women imprisoned who have actual access to family members. The active presence of students from the City College and various NGO-s in the prison proves that location matters. Disadvantages from belonging to a men's facility were not tangible. Women's interviews revealed that prison management and educators had been open and supportive of their suggestions, and offered a variety of free-time activities. Eger has an excellent reputation among women inmates in other prisons: many interviewed women in other facilities asked for transfers to Eger, yet most were refused due to overcrowding. Unfortunately Eger is by far the smallest facility for women – thus the above-mentioned relative benefits can be enjoyed by about 70 women, less than 10% of imprisoned women in Hungary.

A dedicated mother-child facility was created about two years ago in Hungary which ensures a high-quality and in many ways almost luxurious treatment for women inmates who give birth to babies while in prison – and can stay there until 6 months or 1 year after the child's birth. The physical aspects, equipment of the facility as well as staff numbers are outstanding. However, the mother-child facility is located literally in the middle of a men's prison in Kecskemét. This has the disadvantage that the women can hardly participate in other activities. Apart from the set-up of the mother-child facility, which received attention and has been celebrated by authorities, inmates and the media alike – women inmates' needs are hardly addressed or discussed.

III. Measures and Programs in Prison

Hypothesis 3. Present measures and programs for the social integration or reintegration of women ex-prisoners are inadequate.

3.a. Work within prisons fails to supply inmates with marketable occupational skills or other useful, convertible skills for other areas of life after release.

Work carries special significance in prisons, it is the most important organised activity available for inmates in prisons. However, work in prison should be more than an activity to pass time: it is declared by legislation that prison work is supposed to enable inmates to develop skills for social integration²⁶. We found in our research, that the present conditions of prison work do not adequately fulfil this aim.

Access to work in prison is defined as a right of prisoners, yet despite prisons' efforts, not all inmates can work.²⁷ In addition, available work is limited to a few types of jobs only – which does not allow for matching inmates' skill level to available jobs appropriately. The limited selection of jobs does not allow for changing jobs, e.g. in case of health problems.

²⁶ As it is stated by § 44 of the Penitentiary Code, the aim of prison work “is to help prisoners maintain their physical and spiritual strength, give them the opportunity to acquire and develop professional skills, thus facilitate, after being released, the reintegration process into society”.

²⁷ According to the data of the National Prison Administration, 432 of the 859 female inmates (50%) worked in prison in July 2003. In each women's prison, according to the data, about 45 to 60% of the inmates are employed.

All of the women in our research wanted to work during their imprisonment – and many actually managed to gain access to work at least for some part of their sentence. The very few who could not work²⁸, indeed regretted it.

I would've worked if it had been possible. I only participate in the cleaning of our prison section. I don't have a regular job, this was not made possible by my short sentence. (M8)

Indeed we found that the women were typically highly motivated to take on work. One of the reasons why women agreed to pursue work in prison was to pass the time, yet making money was found to be an important motivating factor, as it enabled women to purchase goods for themselves and even to support their families from the modest earnings.

Available work opportunities either served the maintenance of the institute, or were production activities set up inside the prison, and run by prison companies. Among the maintenance jobs mainly laundry, kitchen work, cleaning and hairdressing were available. The majority of the jobs offered by the companies set up within the penitentiaries involved clothes and leather shoe upper-part manufacturing, packaging or agricultural work. For many, the type of work done did not require skill development, however, a few, formerly unskilled women gained access to job skills that they previously did not possess. Unfortunately, the kind of work available, was not perceived to be potentially useful for them in the future.

I would've liked to learn how to make clothes and sew, but I couldn't, I learned to manufacture shoe upper-parts instead. After work, I participated in a 10-month long course on leather shoe upper-part manufacturing, which was exhausting. (...) I got a C+ on my exam and I am very proud of this. I received a certificate at the end of the course. It's a pity that I won't be able to use it for anything after I leave prison. (K8)

Failure to develop marketable skills is linked to the fact that the majority of jobs in prison are gendered: they are typically low-skilled, low-paid, traditional 'women's' jobs. (Light industry, packaging of products or seasonal unskilled agricultural labour). This implies that female inmates leave the penitentiary with generally little or no experience in carrying out work that is valued on the labour market. This shortcoming, however, was not necessarily recognised by prison agents.

Some women addressed problems related to poor working conditions and payment – while many others were actually satisfied despite the very low net salaries, ranging between 2000 forints (8 Euro) and about 15.000 forints (60 Euro)²⁹ monthly. Many

²⁸ Access to work seems to be especially an issue in the Mélykút prison, where apart from the kitchen and laundry, and some cleaning jobs, mainly seasonal agricultural work is only available. This is particularly problematic since Mélykút houses women with a low-security sentence, in whose case work even outside the prison, as well as the maintenance of social contacts should be especially enabled.

²⁹ It could be challenged whether inmates actually received the already very modest earning specified in the legislation as (at least) one-third of the minimum wage of the previous year. The above mentioned net earnings correspond to earnings ranging from approximately 6.000 to 19.000 HUF (between 24 and 77

women addressed the paradoxical discrimination against working inmates as opposed to unemployed ones: a contribution to the cost of imprisonment is deducted from working inmates only (in the value of about 5000 forints, 20 Euro) - while non-working inmates enjoyed the same service without paying any contribution.

Three-quarters of inmates work for pennies in here, it's terrible, they work for 500 and 1000 forints, which is not enough for anything. They are in want for everything because of this. Working in prison is like working as robots do. They get punished if they are not done with the work, and everyone is required to work according to the house rules. (K12)

Very significant differences were found in the remuneration between maintenance jobs done for the prison, and other type of work for the prison companies. In maintenance work (laundry, kitchen, etc.) the pay was generally much higher. In our small sample, predominantly women with better educational and social background were able to get these jobs. Women who were in the most disadvantaged social position, were typically less able to 'negotiate' for those better-paid and more prestigious jobs.

According to Hungarian legislation, inmates on LER and in low-security regimes may be employed outside the prison without supervision – this is meant to enable the labour-market integration and maintenance of social relationships for these inmates. None of the women in our research worked for third-party employers in this sense.

Although interviewed agents were generally satisfied with employment in women's prisons, they also addressed a few problems and difficulties.

If a workday remains to be 8 hours long, as it is now, then inmates often have to make a choice between learning and working. The current employment ratio of inmates is 50-60%. Those who might want to study while working must also have a long enough prison sentence in order to be able to complete a certain course. As for employment in prison, it would be better to provide part-time work opportunities as well, since it would give more time to inmates for other things such as studying, consulting with their lawyers, spending time outdoors, etc. (A4)

The system lacks the hiring capability like we had back in the eighties, when we were able to provide jobs for everyone. The other drawback is that working in prison does not count as regular employment³⁰, it does not contribute to their pension. (A1)

Euro), prior to the deduction of cost of imprisonment. Currently the minimum wage is 53.000 HUF (214 Euro), a third of it amounts to 71 Euro. Even though our sample is statistically not representative, we must conclude that there are a number of women in prison who certainly do not earn one-third of the minimum wage.

³⁰During imprisonment inmates are not insured by the social security system. No social security payments are thus made from their earnings, and the time spent at work in prison does not contribute to their total social security insurance time. This causes significant disadvantages for them, since a number of allowances (both related to unemployment as well as family benefits) are linked to social security. Contribution to the pension funds is also linked to the number of years spent in the social security system.

In fact, both notions were reflected in women's experiences as well, several women argued that they had to choose between work and training – and a few simply dropped training in order to make a little money. A few women also expressed the injustice in prison work not being acknowledged as real work since it does not contribute to the time recorded in the social security system. Some women actually experienced the negative consequences of this regulation after their release from prison, in not gaining access to services linked to the length of time spent in the social security insurance system.

3.b. Training and education in prisons does not sufficiently contribute to the acquisition of education and skills needed after release.

The educational background of women in our research reflected the alarmingly low level of education among female prisoners in Hungary.³¹ An observable trend in penitentiaries is a focus on elementary education, which is partly a result of the previous system of compulsory elementary education in prisons.³² Elementary schooling is available in two of the three penitentiaries with female inmates, whereas in Eger a basic literacy course is provided. The low level of schooling of the majority of women inmates certainly makes the emphasis on basic education necessary. Even though in our research not every inmate continued school in prison, many made use of it and left the institution with finished elementary certificates or a few more classes than they previously had.

I attended school until I was 13 and I finished fourth grade. I flunked several times. (...) I continued elementary school here in prison, but I didn't quite finish eighth grade. I'll finish it up when I am released. (M15)

Yet, an elementary school qualification alone is not sufficient in the labour market. Agents at the Labour Office reinforced that unskilled women are especially in a disadvantaged position in the Hungarian labour market. The importance of vocational training for the women in prison is critical due to the high number of women who do not possess any vocational or further training: currently this amounts to 75% of women inmates. Although some type of vocational training is provided in most women's penitentiaries, the range and availability of courses was found to be insufficient. Firstly, only a couple of such courses are started each year, thus they only reach a small portion of potential recruits. Secondly, the range of courses is limited - while a training course in shoe manufacturing is held each year, other, less specific and more marketable courses, such as computer literacy, are rare. Most vocational training courses, e.g. in lace making

This problem had also been addressed in the report of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee. (in: *The Double Standard – Prison Conditions in Hungary*, Hungarian Helsinki Committee, Budapest 2002.)

³¹The importance of both general education and vocational training for women in prisons is critical given the high ratio of women with no education (5%), incomplete elementary education (20%), or elementary education only (45%).(Data from the NPA, July 2003.) In our research half of the interviewed women had at best elementary education (several of them did not complete elementary school, one of them was illiterate) while others held vocational qualifications or a final examination from high school, and one woman had a college degree.

³² Elementary education used to be compulsory in prisons, even though from 1993 participation was made voluntary, prisons and educators continued to put an emphasis on it.

and leather shoe upper-part manufacturing, prepare for gendered professions only. Training in feminised and low-paid jobs provides little improvement in their labour market position. While some women were aware of this problem, they generally valued the acquired vocational training qualification high.

I completed a course in lace making. The teacher and I became friends, we still keep in touch. I would like to continue doing this type of work, making lace. It was a one-year long course, quite a difficult one. I even earned a certificate at the end. (K12)

Participation in secondary education, although theoretically encouraged, is almost entirely missing among women inmates, and none of the women in our research attended secondary school courses in prison, although a few believed it would be useful.

While there is an evident shortage of available courses in elementary and secondary as well as vocational education, women's prison offer unaccredited training courses. Many such activities are recreational, rather than educational. Yet, a few focus on improving self-perception, interactive skills or are targeted towards developing job-seeking skills, occasionally they include language training. The number of available extra courses differs significantly among the women's prisons. The smallest institute, Eger offers the broadest range of such courses, whereas the largest institution, Kalocsa has a relatively modest offering. Such additional activities, if available, were welcome by the interviewed women, since they were found to offer variety and distraction from other activities, and were perceived as potentially useful.

The choir was the best, it was a good way to have some fun and our rehearsals were great as well. When we went to perform, the guards and other prison personnel treated us differently, we were treated more like human beings. In here they are in charge, but out there you could talk to them and for example we didn't have to form a line and walk in pairs either. (...) (E4)

Apart from the limited range of activities, the most often mentioned reasons for inmates not taking part in education or other training activities, were short prison sentences and the clash of such courses and activities with work. Also, some women reported about the subjective assessments involved in granting rewards (and punishments) by educators, whereby the access to such activities is influenced.

Members of the prison administration addressed some of the obstacles to offering more training programs, especially the limited physical space, financial constraints or the difficulties in recruiting participants for some activities. One of the recognised ways to broaden the range of activities without increasing the financial burden, is through the involvement of NGO-s in the field of education and training. The NGO-s reported increasing openness from the prisons, however also emphasised that their co-operation is still often charged with difficulties, especially with bureaucratic constraints, and obstacles that stem from the dominance of the security principle.

In the first year our organisation mostly just tried to arrange for the agreement of co-operation with the authorities to be finalised. This took us a whole year. (A12)

Yes, I do think that access to computers can be granted even by satisfying all safety regulations. You just have to want to do it. The system must really take steps in this direction. (A12)

3.c Women do not receive enough preparation and support for their smooth return to family (and other intimate ties) and integration into the community.

A month prior to their release, most women in our research believed that measures to make their return to their family and social environment were insufficient – although most of them felt ready for the release. Measures that serve the maintenance of family ties and other social contacts, were already discussed in hypothesis two, thus now the report focuses on the immediate preparation for release and on the role of various state agents in it.

In terms of the agents role in inmate's preparation for release, educators and probation officers have a primary responsibility according to the regulations. Educators are responsible in general for inmates' development. According to our research, educators in most cases failed to give individual attention to women's needs in general, and in preparation for release, in particular. Every inmate was assigned to an educator, yet educators were responsible for 60 to 80 inmates on average. Most inmates thought that educators' role is constrained to the administrative management of their everyday lives - typically permissions and correspondence. The heavy administrative load reported by educators themselves was perceived as a problem by most inmates, who assessed this as an obstacle for making real contacts with educators. However, some women reported to have received personal attention from the educator if they required it. Yet, others heavily criticised educators for not fulfilling their tasks or abusing their power.

The educator has helped me a great deal and has given me advice as well, I am quite satisfied with him. The others say various things about him, but I had no problems and I was happy with him. (K8)

Educators lord over us in here, many things depend on them. I feel that I didn't get anything from the educators. There was only one person with whom I was able to establish some type of rapport. (...) An educator once told me, 'Dear, don't think. You are not here to think but to serve your sentence.' (...) This same educator also said that 'your kind must be eliminated not released.' There has only been one educator with whom I had a normal relationship, but this was because we hardly ever spoke. Somehow she realised that I'm better off left alone. (K12)

Insufficient attention to inmates' individual needs causes particular problems in preparation for release. The preparation should start six months prior to the release from prison. Most of the interviewed inmates reported not to have participated in any preparation for release from prison, in fact, many had difficulties with understanding the

question due to the absolute lack of help. Although some inmates received information on the services of probation officers on a few occasions, inmates did not perceive the general information sessions as useful, in that this did not help them make concrete arrangements for the time after release regarding housing, employment, welfare benefits, etc.

There was a presentation in prison about probation, but they weren't convincing to me. They provided us with their address and contact information, but I wouldn't turn to them for help. (M20)

I am going to meet with my probation officer once a month. We will discuss what I should do and what I mustn't do. (M15)

The need for co-operation between prisons and probation officers has been broadly recognised by the authorities at all levels. It has led to a growing number of co-operations between penitentiaries and the corresponding local sections of the POS. Yet, many of these actually focus on general services, as the above-mentioned general information sessions. The division of responsibilities between prison educators and probation officers is in many ways still open for interpretation. Thus, the actual practice and especially its tangible advantages for the inmates still have to be worked out in the future.

Non-state agents - most often teachers or NGO activists - were an important source of inspiration and support both during the imprisonment and also after the release for the few women who established such relationships in prison. For them, the NGO or the prison priest meant vital support, e.g. in ensuring accommodation, clothing, inspiration and continuity. Many prison officials expect primarily NGO-s to provide significant support in reintegration-related efforts, as well as in ensuring continuity. Currently however, such involvement is rather specific and limited in most prisons. It is rather specific in that civil involvement usually means religious organisations, and their activities in the spiritual preparation of inmates – as well as their material services e.g. in providing clothing for inmates to be released. NGO involvement is rather limited currently, especially little can be reported about assistance in preparation for release and support during the first steps in life after release. While NGO-s in many ways would be much better suited to provide continuity, the currently limited number and scope of activity of such NGO-s suggests that they cannot immediately fulfil such needs.

IV. Life After Release

Hypothesis 4: Several barriers to the social integration/ reintegration of women ex-prisoners remain.

Due to the lack of adequate attention to preparations for the first steps after release, most inmates left prison without plans or arrangements for most spheres of life. In fact, most women could not imagine their life within one year's time – and plainly stated that they wanted to be happy. The desire for happiness - most often envisaged through happy family life – and a firm belief in not returning to prison were the most stable and often recurring elements of women's image about their future. Yet, the first few weeks after

release from prison proved to be a difficult time especially for women who served long sentences. In their case, consequences of prisonization were tangible: restlessness, insomnia, depression and a desire to return to the routine of the prison were frequent. Their relationship with children and family members presented many challenges as well. Yet, for many, the family became the strongest pillar of life after release - while all women were faced with exclusion especially in the labour market.

Reproduction of primary exclusion patterns in the labour market and new exclusionary factors

While all women worked in the prison, this work experience did not help them gain employment after prison. Many of them worked in sewing workshops during their imprisonment and several of them gained vocational qualification in upper-part shoe manufacturing. Yet, these skills were not much demanded after their release: none of the women gained employment in this or any related field. Apart from the poor market value of these gendered and obsolete job skills, the criminal record³³ formed a very strong barrier to gaining employment. All women who actively searched jobs - and indeed, the great majority of women did so - anticipated that the criminal record would be a barrier and most of them encountered the expected difficulties.

My biggest problem is unemployment. Yes, I keep searching for a job but I haven't found one yet. The main problem is that I don't have a certificate of no criminal record. (K3)

A few women were able to gain employment because the employer did not ask for the certificate. In some cases, women's past was discovered and they were fired, while a few lucky and tactful women got away without the certificate or manipulated the employer successfully. None of the women who eventually gained registered employment could tell their employer about the prison record – even agents at the Labour Office encourage their clients not to tell first. The criminal record is in some cases required for training courses as well: a woman applied to a nursing training through the Labour Office, however, she was rejected due to her criminal record. While many women registered at the Labour Office, none of them were given unemployment benefit, and none found employment or training courses through the Labour Office. Two women were offered 'public work', however they refused. Others gave up looking for a job after repeated refusals.

The few women who ultimately succeeded in gaining registered employment, worked at the low end of job hierarchies, in low-skilled and low-wage jobs – most often in factory jobs. All women who gained registered employment, possessed medium-level educational qualifications. Others took up very insecure small jobs, temporary or

³³ The "certificate of no criminal record", or as called in Hungarian, the 'ethical certificate', is issued by the authorities, and it registers the key data about the crime committed, sentence served and is valid for several years after the crime, depending on its severity. It is customary in Hungary – and the Labor Code enables this practice – that employers require the certificate prior to signing the employment contract. Theoretically, it serves the right of employers to be informed about the criminal record – and it shall not mean automatic rejection of the potential employee.

seasonal employment, usually cleaning jobs. In several cases women had very negative experiences with such employers who took advantage of them, e.g. did not want to pay them or sexually harassed them - and some women were approached to engage in prostitution. Some women whose family ties were disrupted, were forced to take up housekeeping jobs to secure accommodation and work. However, such housekeeping jobs in single man's houses led to exploitation and sexual harassment within weeks or days and the women had to run away. The women's ultimate strategy was to leave, even without getting paid in order to avoid trouble – since trouble meant return to prison.

I also looked into contracts of life-long support, but one of them turned out to be a personal ad although this wasn't stated specifically. I stayed with him for five days and I worked very hard. Finally, when I wanted to leave he hit me, I had to run away, I even left my phone there. He was yelling at me, he said he'd have me returned to prison, that he would take me to the police. Then I noticed that this ad kept appearing in the newspaper. I want to write to the mayor's office, I mean this person is a psychopath. (K10)

In conclusion it must be stressed that the very few women who gained registered employment, all had medium-level qualifications and were very persistent in the job search. Most of them actually moved to Budapest and took up relatively low skilled, low-paid factory jobs. However, this was not an option for others: those without any prior qualification, vocational skill or for women residing in a small village with poor job opportunities. Once again, patterns of primary exclusion were reinforced, e.g. none of the "Roma Mothers" gained registered employment. Yet new factors of exclusion were added in some cases, due to the lack of registered employment and the need to take up temporary, black work or housekeeping jobs.

Family: the ultimate support

The great majority of women returned to live with their family, most often, to their parents – only in a few cases to their partners. Return to the children and family was the strongest source of inspiration and support upon which their new life could rest. Many emphasised that their relationship with family became even stronger. Return to parents often meant reunion with their children, since most often parents took care of the children during the women's imprisonment. Sometimes women returned to their parents together with their partners, however, the resulting overcrowding and poor living conditions in many cases caused everyday struggles. Many women perceived the situation of living with parents only as temporary. However, moving to a rented flat was almost impossible to be financed, and affordable places tended to be also very inadequate.

I live in the same place with my family, it's a flat subsidised by the state. I am not happy with the situation, there is no running water and it's in a lousy neighbourhood. My mother is ill and bedridden, it's hard to care for her. (K3)

However, the few women who experienced break-up of family ties, went through the most difficult times of their lives. Especially victims of domestic violence were trapped if access to their children was denied or if they abusive partners blackmailed them with the

children. For the women who did lose their children either through state care or due to abusive partners, gaining children back seemed hopeless in the first weeks and months after release. Even women who had nowhere to go, avoided temporary shelters at all costs: they refused to be identified as homeless. Alternatives as taking up housekeeping jobs, reproduced the vulnerable position of women and added new grievances, as discussed above. Housing needs of people released from prison are not recognised and addressed by state authorities, even though most of the agents in our research named housing needs as one of the most immediate difficulties after release.

For many women the insecurities in housing, the daily struggle with overcrowding and poverty, the need to look after children or ill mothers combined with poor potentials in the labour market led to situations in which the various forms of exclusion reinforced each other and breaking out became hardly possible.

I do feel that it is more difficult to make ends meet. Being confined is making me more tense. Even now I am at home and I have to adapt to my in-laws. I feel that now that I am free, I want everything too quickly. I worry about finances the most, and I would really like to move away from here. I hope it'll work. We are planning on moving to my grandmother's studio. I would like to be alone with my children, I feel that I just can't find my own way. It's very difficult, because my husband isn't around and all the burdens are on me. I hope we can move out next week. (E4)

Lacking continuity and co-operation among authorities

Co-operation between prisons, probation service and other state agents e.g. the Labour Office is currently insufficient, however, it is undergoing changes as a result of recent transformations in the institutional environment. The POS is in the process of establishing regular co-operation with Labour Offices, which in some parts of the country has led to regular information sessions and exchange between probation officers and the Labour Office. The POS aims at developing co-operation also with homeless shelters, however, at this stage, we cannot report tangible services to the women e.g. in the area of housing, as shown above.

Lack of sufficient continuity and co-operation among authorities resulted in several disadvantages for the released women. Many left prison without valid personal documents: identity card, address registry card, social security card and tax card, etc. Women faced two difficulties regarding access to documents: in addition to the financial burden, the various bureaucratic requirements made the process rather difficult and slow, which in turn presented barriers to and delays in their access to work, welfare or medication. Some of the most assertive women succeeded in getting money for the document from their probation officers or local governments, however, others did not – and thus were left without documents.

I don't have a social security card and an address registry card. I can't even get the other necessary documents without having these first. I was told I could get

early retirement, but I still have to start this process. I am totally lost in these bureaucratic matters, they just keep sending me from one place to the next. (K8)

Information on various forms of welfare was similarly difficult to find. Most women left prison with a few thousand forints - the obligatory saving in the value of one month's pay in prison – which was often used up by the trip home. Most women knew, that the local governments may give a once-off aid to people in need, the so-called 'temporary aid', in the value of 5000 forints (20 Euro). Many decided to ask for this money, however, some were refused – while others refused to ask for such a symbolic amount of money. Currently in Hungary there is no welfare available specifically for people released from prison. However, there are various forms of social welfare for which the women could have applied – and some of them indeed applied. Yet, many women were not aware of the available forms of aid, the various authorities in question, and the conditions.

The welfare system is completely unclear to me. My mother receives some type of welfare, so I guess I wouldn't be able to. (M15)

Women who did gain access to some form of welfare – typically did so through some kind of child-care benefit, or, in a few cases, through taking care of their ill mothers. The income however, was not sufficient to cover subsistence costs. Through this kind of welfare practice, traditional gender roles are reinforced, yet payments do not actually allow for survival. This practice also means that women without (small) children, are in the worst position regarding access to welfare. Thus women who leave prison without family ties – elder women, single and childless women, victims of domestic violence – have not only to cope without vital family assistance, but have smaller chances for getting even some very modest welfare aid.

The women did not expect much practical help from the probation officers, they understood the control function of probation officers to be their main mission. Some women had difficulties establishing contact with their probation officer and were worried about the consequences. Others had difficulties with travelling to the probation officers, especially because they lacked the money, or they could not attend monthly meetings due to other obligations. In case the women failed to show up, they were given a warning. Most women did not consider the meetings to be useful. The only practical use some could see was due to the few thousand forints of emergency help – most often asked to arrange personal documents.

I was told by the probation officer that life is difficult on the outside. I asked him for some money, he gave me 5000 forints with which I bought a winter coat. He seemed nice although he can't help me. These meetings are useless, nothing happens afterwards. (M15)

During the 10 months of follow-up in the MIP research, none of the women returned to prison – and no new criminal proceeding was initiated against them. However, the majority of them were approached by earlier criminal contacts and a few of them were

tempted to engage in new crime. Due to the poverty experienced after release, some considered the prison to be a better place, at least in terms of the material conditions.

The one good thing about prison was that we didn't have to concern ourselves with food and accommodation, that was provided to us unlike now, on the outside. I mean I don't want to go back and have that life, but I don't want to live like this either, this isn't a life after all. I often think that it would be better to just die³⁴. I have no prospects whatsoever. The thought of returning to prison has actually crossed my mind. I am really worn out by everything. (K8)

The overwhelming majority of women suffered from poverty greater or just as great as poverty experienced before the prison. Despite this strong general trend however, some patterns could be identified in the survival 'strategies'.

The few women who succeeded in gaining permanent, registered employment actually mostly enjoyed rather stable family lives as well. Some of them even continued higher education and were in general pleased with their lives. These women, without exception, all held medium-level educational qualifications prior to their entry to prison, and only one of them was Roma – thus they enjoyed a relatively favourable structural position compared to many of the other women. They also received considerable family support after they left the prison.

Family however, became and remained for many other women the one and only foundation of survival after the prison. The notion that the importance of family support in reintegration was particularly vital due to the lack of co-ordinated and effective support from the authorities has already been addressed in the report. Major barriers to labour-market integration steered many women towards reliance on the family even more - and the dominance of child-care support among the available forms of welfare also reinforced the value of motherhood. Thus, a number of women based their survival strategy on their families, particularly on children – and tried to live from various forms of child-related welfare, or became pregnant immediately after release from prison. Other women were financially fully dependent on their parents and partners. However, it must be noted that initially they all attempted to find work – and some of them continued to look for work after months of trying.

Women who were not able to find work, nor rely on active family support, were in the most difficult position. Some have already lost their children due to state care, or had grown-up children, or could not meet their children due to domestic violence. Their parents/ partners have died or were too poor to support them – or such support was impossible due to a former domestic violence incident. Thus these women not only had to face labour-market exclusion, but had major housing problems - became practically homeless - and could not finance the first weeks and months. Some of them had very little emotional support to rely on – in fact, some victims of domestic violence had to face the potential of meeting their former batterers. It is these women who were forced to take up e.g. housekeeping jobs, thus were likely to be exploited and harassed again.

³⁴ She attempted suicide about 4 months after being released.

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