

Hidden Poverty in Hungary: the Impact of the Compulsory Public Works Program¹ on Young People in Marginal Communities

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Abstract

Poverty knows no national boundaries. It can be found in every country. Hungary is no exception. We can see poverty-stricken zones in every city, even in the centre. But what about the areas we don't even know about? There are marginal territories where people are totally cut off from the rest of the country. We tend to take it for granted that education is one of our fundamental rights even though we may complain about having to study a lot including many subjects we are not interested in etc. But out there, many youngsters struggle to survive without experiencing what education really is about. People without qualifications living in marginal areas struggle merely to survive. Does an escape route from such a situation exist? Does the public works scheme² in Hungary³ help people, or does it hold them back? While preparing for this paper, I sought answers to these questions.

Key words: poverty, education, marginal communities, segregation, Roma

Introduction

Readers may find it odd that the title of my paper contains the words “hidden poverty” and not just plain poverty. The answer is simple: the people I am referring to live in areas of the country virtually unknown to most city dwellers. Their situation is totally unfamiliar to most Hungarians; therefore, it is no exaggeration to say that their poverty is hidden. In Hungary the concept of segregation is used in territorial reference in general. This expands to education, too. Segregation refers to the phenomenon in which members of social or ethnic groups live

¹ The term „public employees” used in many Hungarian articles and documents is wrongly translated into English – under this term the Hungarian terminology means “public works programme participants”

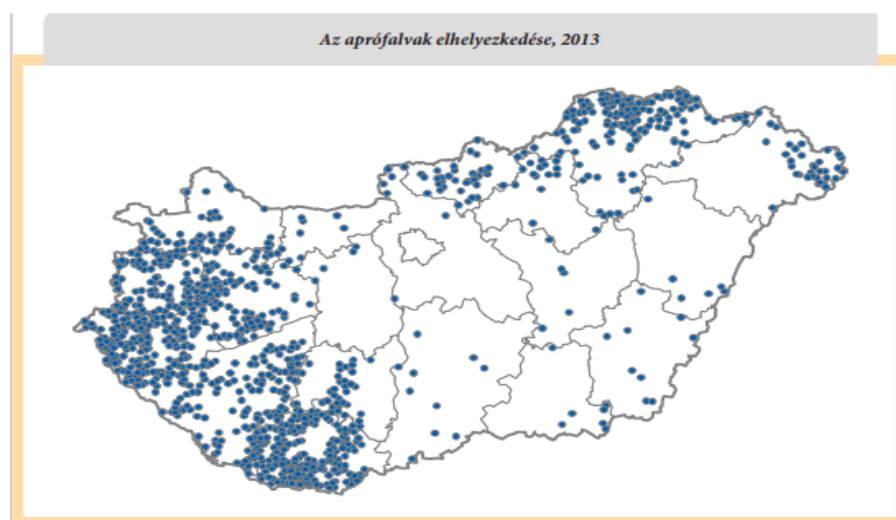
² Fruzsina Albert, 'Reforms to the Hungarian public work scheme', ESPN Flash Report 2017/42, June 2017, at <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=17911&langId=en>, 23.March 2018

³ Landlocked country in Central Europe, at <http://gotohungary.com/general-information/-/article/hungary-general-information-about-hungary>, 26. March 2018

in clearly differentiated areas from other social or ethnic groups. Segregation goes hand in hand with significant differences in income and access to basic infrastructure.⁴ In Hungary these segregated communities tend to be made up of tiny villages, with only a few hundred inhabitants, located far from factories or, in fact, any kind of industry. In this way, these villages and their residents are truly invisible to the rest of the country. But what do we mean when we say tiny villages? For a village to be defined in this way it has to be a settlement with no more than 500 inhabitants. Some 25% of the total population of Hungary live in such communities. Due to their disadvantaged situation, they tend to be found along the country's periphery.⁵

Figures 1 and 2 below are closely related to each other. In Figure 1, we see the geographic distribution of Hungary's so-called tiny villages. Figure 2 shows the distribution of Romanies. Looking at Figure 1 and 2, it is clear that the number of tiny villages correlates positively with the ratio of Romanies. In other words, the higher the ratio of Romanies, the higher the number of tiny villages in the territory.

Figure 1

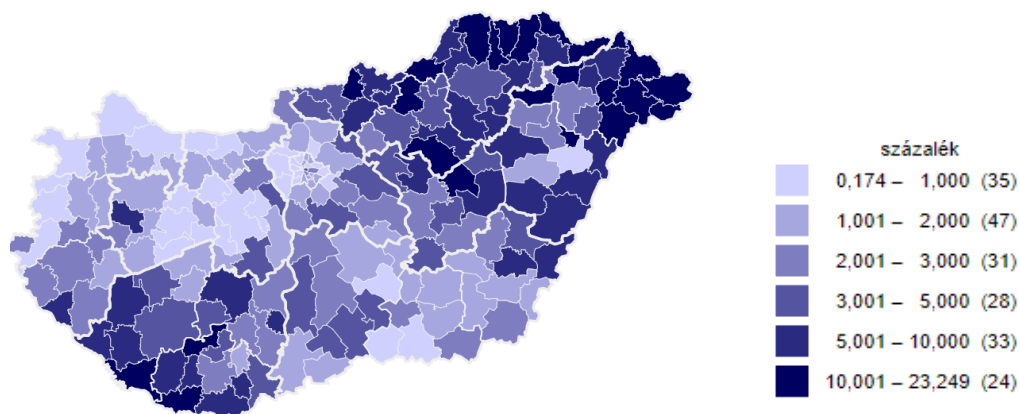


Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 'Small villages' in Settlements Network of Hungary 2, Budapest 2015, p.62

Figure 2

⁴ http://nemzetisegek.hu/dokumentumok/file_1111447058_szegregacio.pdf - Sociological concept of segregation, 09.04.2018

⁵ <http://www.terport.hu/telepulesek/telepulestipusok>, 23.March 2018



'Distribution of Roma communities in 2011', Hungarian Central Statistics Office, population census 2011, at <http://www.ksh.hu/interaktiv/terkepek/mo/nemz.html>, 23.March 2018

An aggravating aspect: uncertain family background, segregation in education

What about education? Does it too lead into a blind alley? The three most poverty-prone groups within the population are: Roma, children, and inhabitants of marginal territories.⁶

In my presentation I take into consideration all three groups. Although it is not my intention to focus on the condition of Hungary's Roma population, as the majority of the inhabitants of marginal areas are made up of Roma families, most of whom tend to have many children, dealing with Roma issues is unavoidable in any discussion of poverty in Hungary. My impression is that the most serious unresolved issue with regard to poverty at present is the failure to integrate marginalized children into the education system. Children of poor families often attend neither kindergarten nor school. As a result, they fail to learn the norms, either behavioural or skills-related, necessary for integration into society. Children living in underdeveloped territories, born to poor families, acquire and accept norms and aspects, which surrounds them – in most cases the norms of their families. These norms in general vary from the values of society and, in many cases, they are in conflict with them; thus, they do not conform to the norms which form the basis of the educational system. Without adequate education these children will suffer from intellectual, social and in most cases

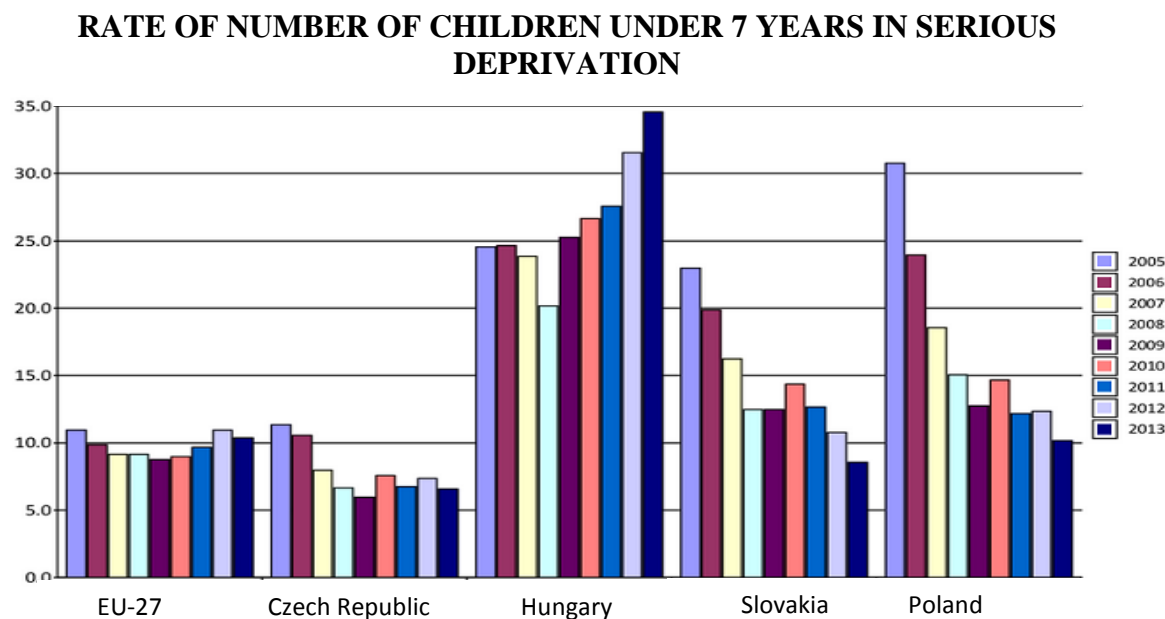
⁶ 'National social catching-up strategy – extreme poverty, child poverty, Romanies (2011-2020)', analysis of the government, at http://romagov.kormany.hu/download/9/e3/20000/Stratégia_1sz_melléklet_Helyzetelemzés.pdf, 23. March 2018, p. 3

medical disadvantages, which will most likely insure that they remain poor even after reaching adulthood.⁷

As I see it, poverty does not refer only to material possessions. Being cut off from valuable social networks is also an aspect of poverty. Someone who has attended university – even someone who has just an average job – will have established a wide network of personal contacts. If such a person needs to get something done, with a few phone calls, it will turn out, that there will be someone among his or her acquaintances who can be of help. However, this is in general not true in the case of inhabitants of marginalized territories. Networks of contacts are in a way even more important than professional skills and experience.

A problem of serious concern is the situation of children born to extremely poor families. According to a EUROSTAT⁸ survey comparing the ratio of children under seven years living in serious deprivation in the Visegrad Four countries⁹ and the European Union (EU)¹⁰, the condition of Hungarian children was found to be the most seriously aggravated.

Figure 3



⁷ 'National social catching-up strategy – extreme poverty, child poverty, Romanies (2011-2020)', analysis of the government, at http://romagov.kormany.hu/download/9/e3/20000/Strategia_1sz_melleklet_Helyzetelemzès.pdf, 23. March 2018, p. 29-41.

⁸ Statistical office of the European Union, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/about/overview>, 26. March 2018

⁹ Effort of the Central European region to work together in a number of fields of common interest, member states: Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, at <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/about>, 26. March 2018

¹⁰ Union of 28 European countries, at https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/eu-in-brief_en#the_eu_in_the_world, 26. March 2018

Bence Stubnya, Kata Janecskó, 'Newest data of poverty are disappointing', 20.November 2014, at https://index.hu/chart/2014/11/20/elkeseritoek_a_szegeenyseg_legujabb_adatai/?token=5ed53b73600e03cf2112b1f6ed2138ae, 23.March 2018

Problems can also appear even if the children attend kindergarten or school. First of all, in general, these disadvantaged children attend educational institutions less frequently than children who come from stable backgrounds. To some extent truancy may be due to financial hardships on the part of the child's family but the negative attitude of parents towards education also constitutes a serious stumbling block. In most cases the parents of poor children did not themselves finish school. As a result, they see little value in education. What is worse, according to research conducted on extreme poverty by the National Social Redevelopment Strategy¹¹, the educational system is incapable of counteracting the disadvantages resulting from family circumstances. The fundamental problems are as follows: cooperation between parents and child protection agencies does not address relevant issues; teachers and educators are in most cases insufficiently prepared to educate underprivileged children; the Hungarian education system does not provide enough of the basic skills needed for students to be able to participate in the labour market and it does not promote life-long learning. The Hungarian education system is among those within the OECD¹² that support equality the least. Success of children is determined largely by the qualifications and profession of parents.¹³

But how is all this connected to public works and within that, training programs? Many youngsters cannot complete school because of the negative circumstances mentioned above. Thus, without adequate qualifications they do not have the possibility to escape from their marginal circumstances and have little choice but to stay in their villages, where apart from the tiny grocery store and pub, there are no work opportunities. So, what can be the solution? Participating in the public works program. In the space below I will try to explain the purpose

¹¹ A strategy supporting people living in extreme poverty, children in poverty, Roma inhabitants, at <http://romagov.kormany.hu/download/8/e3/20000/Strategia.pdf>, November 2011, 26. March 2018

¹² The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, helping governments to fight against poverty through economic growth and financial stability, at <http://www.oecd.org/about/whatwedoandhow/>, 26. March 2018

¹³ 'National social catching-up strategy – extreme poverty, child poverty, Romanies (2011-2020)', analysis of the government, at http://romagov.kormany.hu/download/9/e3/20000/Strategia_1sz_melléklet_Helyzetelemzés.pdf, 23.March 2018, p. 29-41.

of the Hungarian public works scheme, how it works, what kind of training is provided for participants, and what advantages and disadvantages the system has for young people.

The Hungarian Public Works Scheme

The main goal of the public works programme is to activate long term unemployed people and to prevent permanent job seekers from dropping out of the work force. The programme is designed to offer work for people who are of working age but who lack either educational qualifications or professional skills. The coordination of this new programme was transferred to the Ministry of Interior in July 2011 for the purpose of offering temporary employment to individuals who have been excluded from the primary labour market and are living in disadvantaged districts and settlements.¹⁴

Figure 4 below breaks down the number of public works programme participants as of 2016 according to level of education and place of residence. The figure clearly shows that inhabitants of disadvantaged settlements make up a disproportionately high number of programme participants. Moreover, it is also clear that the participants do not have high educational qualifications: from the total number of 223,470 participants in 2016, 8.6% have never attended school. The largest group – 46% of the total -- consists of those who have completed primary education. The next group -- 26% -- finished secondary training school or a trade school. Those who completed secondary vocational training school or grammar school accounted for 16.9%. A mere 2.5% have any tertiary education.

Figure 4

Distribution of public works programme participants according to level of education and residence, 2016 (average)						
	Living in disadvantaged settlements		Living in non-disadvantaged settlements		Total	
	persons	%	persons	%	persons	%
without primary education	16 752	7.5%	2 450	1.1%	19 201	8.6%
primary education	86 496	38.7%	16 321	7.3%	102 817	46.0%
secondary training school, trade school	47 249	21.1%	10 788	4.8%	58 037	26.0%
secondary vocational training school, grammar school	26 858	12.0%	10 977	4.9%	37 835	16.9%

¹⁴ <http://kozfoglalkoztataskormany.hu/information-on-the-current-status-of-public-work-scheme-pws-in-hungary> 23.March 2018

tertiary education	2 697	1.2%	2 883	1.3%	5 580	2.5%
Total	180 051	80.6%	43 418	19.4%	223 470	100.0%

⁷Public work programme participants broken down according to level of education and residence, 2016 (average), from Public Employment (sic!) Yearbook (2011-2016), document obtained through personal correspondence with Sándor Bézi, associate of the Deputy Secretariat for Public Employment (sic!) of the Ministry of Interior, 25. January 2018

The state finances the direct costs of employment while giving opportunities for value-adding work for individuals in need. Another important objective of this programme is to transmit to participants knowledge of a working culture required to find a job on the primary labour market and the acquisition of necessary qualifications.¹⁵ As the latest data from January 2018 show, the public works programme provides an income and possibility to work full time in most cases, for approximately 126,500 citizens at a monthly salary of 81,809 HUF¹⁶. (about 263.50 €)¹⁷

Figure 5 shows the average number of participants divided by places of residence as of September 2017. The numbers here too point to a clear correlation between place of residence and participation in the public works scheme. In regions where the distribution of small villages and Roma families is the highest, the number of participants in the public works scheme is also higher than in better-served regions such as central Hungary. The following counties stand out as having the largest number of public works participants: Zala, 5,141 participants in 2016; Somogy 10,917; Baranya 15,144; and Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén 38,035.

Figure 5

Average monthly number of participants in the Public Work Scheme (by the places of residence of the participant)									
Region (NUTS2)	County (NUTS3)	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2016. 1-9 months	2017. 1-9 months
		yearly average							
Central Hungary	Budapest	1 344	1 652	1 958	4 363	4 490	4 357	4 351	2 716
	Pest megye	2 878	3 095	3 656	6 500	6 665	7 157	7 286	5 424
Central Transdanubia	Fejér megye	1 776	2 436	3 113	4 962	4 676	4 896	4 965	3 588
	Komárom-Esztergom megye	1 247	1 419	1 384	2 670	2 825	3 237	3 319	2 518
	Veszprém	2 203	2 564	2 767	4 380	4 219	4 534	4 637	3 354

¹⁵ <http://kozfoglalkoztataskormany.hu/information-on-the-current-status-of-public-work-scheme-pws-in-hungary>, 23. March 2018

¹⁶ Labour data of participants in the Public Works Scheme, http://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xstadat/xstadat_evkozi/e_qli038.html, 22 March.2018.

¹⁷ Exchange on the 22th of March 2018, https://hu.coinmill.com/EUR_HUF.html#HUF=81.809

	mege								
Western Transdanubia	Győr-Moson-Sopron megye	919	1 320	1 319	2 146	2 070	2 206	2 221	1 678
	Vas megye	1 011	1 390	1 365	2 178	2 497	2 375	2 374	1 781
	Zala megye	1 934	2 497	2 685	4 050	5 206	5 141	5 141	4 269
Southern Transdanubia	Baranya megye	3 901	6 097	9 052	11 063	13 785	15 144	15 326	12 975
	Somogy megye	4 339	4 960	6 808	7 742	9 332	10 917	11 038	8 509
	Tolna megye	2 368	2 308	2 982	4 159	4 685	4 653	4 760	3 749
Northern Hungary	Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén megye	11 194	13 520	23 212	29 553	37 255	38 035	38 347	32 928
	Heves megye	2 683	3 639	4 336	7 668	7 657	7 968	8 171	6 058
	Nógrád megye	2 862	2 797	4 417	6 731	8 199	8 015	8 086	6 768
Northern Great Plain	Hajdú-Bihar megye	6 567	7 432	10 396	16 138	18 856	21 723	21 870	18 032
	Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok megye	4 471	6 074	9 427	12 257	12 374	13 169	13 459	9 996
	Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg megye	12 375	13 885	18 273	24 909	32 764	37 057	37 386	32 235
Southern Great Plain	Bács-Kiskun megye	4 264	4 902	5 773	8 055	8 720	10 131	10 173	8 487
	Békés megye	4 750	6 632	9 429	12 553	15 370	15 493	15 726	12 737
	Csongrád megye	2 723	3 795	4 316	6 772	6 480	7 261	7 253	6 111
Total		75 810	92 412	126 668	178 850	208 127	223 470	225 891	183 912

‘Average monthly number of participants in the public works scheme according to place of residence of participant’; information obtained through personal correspondence with Sándor Bézi, associate of the Deputy Secretariat for Public Employment (sic!) of the Ministry of Interior, 25. January 2018

As a rule, this kind of work opportunity is available only for a temporary period (12 months), extendable by an additional six months. Wages paid through the public works scheme are higher than welfare payments but lower than the lowest wages on the open labour market. Under this system, those taking part in the public works programme have the possibility to obtain social insurance and old-age pension benefits.¹⁸

¹⁸ <http://kozfoglalkoztataskormany.hu/information-on-the-current-status-of-public-work-scheme-pws-in-hungary>, 23.March 2018

Tasks that can be done in the public works programme

A great variety of tasks are covered by the public works programme including agriculture where there is strong demand for temporary workers. More than half of Hungary's cooperatives are principally engaged in agricultural production, to which there has been an ongoing flow of public works participants since 2014.

In the following chart we can see the top list of jobs performed in each category of work covered by the programme. Data in Figure 6 are from 2016 and are based on annual average participant numbers.

Figure 6

Participants of longer-term public works programme		National public works programme		District 'Start Work'	
<i>Occupation (HCSO)</i>	No. of persons	<i>Occupation (HCSO)</i>	No. of persons	<i>Occupation (HCSO)</i>	No. of persons
Other simple service and transport occupation not elsewhere classified	55 337	Other simple service and transport occupation not elsewhere classified	7 995	Other simple service and transport occupation not elsewhere classified	45 504
Other cleaner and helper	9 322	General office attendant	6 696	Simple agricultural occupation	9 665
Institutional cleaner and helper	3 498	Simple forestry, hunting and fishery labourer	5 176	Agricultural labourer	5 813
General office attendant	2 512	Construction labourer	4 217	Other simple construction industry occupation	4 827
Public area cleaner	2 285	Other industry and construction industry occupation not elsewhere classified	2 556	Work and production organiser	1 844
Other office and handling jobs not elsewhere classified	2 254	Forestry labourer	1 689	Simple industrial occupation	1 708
General maintenance occupation	1 334	Other simple construction industry occupation	1 608	Construction labourer	1 284
Simple agricultural	1 320	Simple	1 390	General office	1 166

occupation		agricultural occupation		attendant	
Garbage collector, street sweeper	1 294	Institutional cleaner and helper	1 111	Construction industry labourer	1 150
Other simple construction industry occupation	1 022	Other cleaner and helper	888	Other cleaner and helper	884
Work and production organiser	1 016	Library, archives registry manager	744	Other industry and construction industry occupation not elsewhere classified	650
Simple industrial occupation	928	Other office and handling jobs not elsewhere classified	695	Stonemason	572
Public cleaner	848	Tarmac layer and road construction worker	606	Other crop cultivation occupation	518
Kitchen helper	774	Simple industrial occupation	601	Other service occupation not elsewhere classified	452
Other handling occupation	735	Work and production organiser	484	Work organiser	405
...
Total	95 662	Total	42 854	Total	76 442

HCSO=Hungarian Standard Classification of Occupations

'Top list of jobs performed in each type of public works employment', in Public Employment (sic!) Yearbook (2011-2016), data obtained through personal correspondence with Sándor Bézi, associate of the Deputy Secretariat for Public Employment (sic!) of the Ministry of Interior, 25. January 2018

Training programme

When speaking about the public works program, we must not forget to mention the opportunity to obtain training. Training under the public works program is designed to provide the trainee with several options and tools leading to further opportunities such as the acquisition of missing core competences, preparing the trainee to join vocational training or the acquisition of missing school qualifications, technical skills as well as additional training. Looking at the school qualifications of those on the program, we can see that more than 50% have no more than primary school qualification. Neither do they have specialized knowledge

in any profession.¹⁹ This stands in the way of their entry into the labour market, but what really separates them from real work is their lack of acquaintance with work culture. Training programs take aim at helping not only young people but everyone hoping to give themselves a second chance in life.

The following chart reveals the number of participants in the public works scheme by age-groups. The number of participants under 25 is lower than the numbers for older age groups – however, in 2016, 27,580 young adults took part in the programme, which is a significant number considering that the population of Hungary is less than 10 million.²⁰

Figure 7

Average monthly number of participants in the public works scheme by age-group	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2016. 1-9 months	2017. 1-9 months
25 years or less	9 921	13 091	20 584	30 469	33 233	27 580	28 115	17 100
26-50 years	51 613	58 088	76 716	105 541	121 832	129 964	131 454	106 708
above 50 years	14 275	21 233	29 367	42 841	53 063	65 926	66 322	60 104
Total	75 810	92 412	126 668	178 850	208 127	223 470	225 891	183 912

‘Average monthly number of participants in the public works scheme by age-group’, information obtained through personal correspondence with Sándor Bézi, associate of the Deputy Secretariat for Public Employment (sic!) of the Ministry of Interior, 25 January 2018.

According to data for December 2016, out of a total number of 223,740 participants, 34,560 took advantage of training programmes in the framework of the EDIOP 6.1.1-15-2015-00001 ‘Training of low skilled individuals and public works scheme participants’ priority project. The number of Roma participants is more than 12,000 which represents a qualified success as supporting people living in marginal territories and/or inhabitants with prejudicial background is one of the main objectives of the public works scheme. Although if we look at the middle column of the chart, we can see that from almost 35,000 participants, only 16,261 completed the training programme successfully. What are the reasons? As I see it, the main problems are the previously mentioned negative circumstances in young age – inappropriate education, resulting in low levels of literacy, unstable family circumstances, and severe financial difficulties. Any of these issues would have a negative impact on the lives of even ordinary

¹⁹

<http://kozfoglalkoztatas.kormany.hu/download/6/eb/02000/current%20status%20of%20Public%20Work%20Scheme.pdf> 23.March 2018

²⁰ <http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/hungary-population/> 23.March 2018

middle-class people. A huge problem with the training programmes is that many participants are illiterate or functionally illiterate. In order to benefit from the training material, at first, they must be taught how to read and write. Much time is taken up with literacy training.²¹

Figure 8

Type of public works programme	Cumulative number of training participants (persons)	Cumulative number of participants successfully completing training (persons)	Cumulative number of Roma participants involved in training (persons)
Longer term programmes	32 370	15 186	12 180
National programmes	974	439	169
District model programmes	1017	493	251
National model programmes	26	9	11
Other model programmes	35	31	3
Training programmes for most disadvantaged regions	0	0	0
Total number of participants in the public works programme	34 422	16 158	12 614
Total number of employed individuals	138	103	3
Training total	34 560	16 261	12 617

²¹Participants of training programmes in the framework of EDIOP 6.1.1-15-2015-00001', information obtained through personal correspondence with Sándor Bézi, associate of the Deputy Secretariat for Public Employment (sic!) of the Ministry of Interior, 25. January 2018

But it is not only the complicated pasts of the disadvantaged participants that influences negatively the outcomes of training programmes. As part of my research for this paper, I had the chance to speak with several mayors of poverty-stricken villages as well as with village residents who had taken advantage of training opportunities. The responses of interviewees were both remarkably consistent and generally negative. They all reported that the training programmes failed to bring about the kind of results that would open up new opportunities for young adults. On the one hand, all acknowledged that whatever its shortcomings, the public works programme, including its training component, were necessary, since in these marginal

²¹ Information from personal meeting with the mayor of Drávapiski, in Alsószentmárton 10. January 2018

areas, there were no other work opportunities. On the other, they stated that the training given in the programme does not lead to qualifications that would allow workers to find real jobs with adequate income. Neither trainers nor trainees seem to be sufficiently motivated. Moreover, young people have fresh memories of bad experiences in school which also dampen their desire to take part in training. As for the qualifications participants receive, there seems to be little demand in the labour market for them. For example, agricultural work enjoys little popularity these days. Likewise, jobs with adequate income and prestige require university degrees. But marginalized young people have virtually no chance to break out from their hopeless situations by their own strength alone. A further unresolved issue is that even if participants in the training programmes are motivated to get a real job, many of the small, marginalized villages are too far away from the urban areas where the jobs are to be found.²² Sándor Pintér, Minister of Interior, stated²³ that in 2016 from 13,612 participants who successfully completed a training programme, only 1,299 could find a real job, which makes for a success rate of 9.5 percent.²⁴

A positive example: Drávapiski

In the previous section, I mentioned a number of disquieting facts about the public works system and the conditions of poverty that it has been created to address. However, as I am a person with a positive outlook, I always want to see the good in everything. In Hungary there are 19 counties. “Baranya”, where I live is located in the south²⁵ and is one of the most underdeveloped regions.²⁶ But exceptions do exist in this county and I am very proud of having found one. ‘Drávapiski’ is a little village with approximately 100 inhabitants²⁷ in ‘Ormánság’, which is one of the most poverty-stricken areas of the European Union. There

²² Details from personal meeting with the mayor of Drávapiski in Alsószentmárton, 10. January 2018

²³ Minister of Interior from 2014, at <http://www.kormany.hu/hu/belugyminiszterium/a-miniszter/eletrajz>, 26. March 2018

²⁴ Letter from Sándor Pintér, Minister of Interior to Erzsébet Schmuck, member of the parliament, 25. June 2017, at <http://www.parlament.hu/irom40/16594/16594-0001.pdf>, 25. March 2018

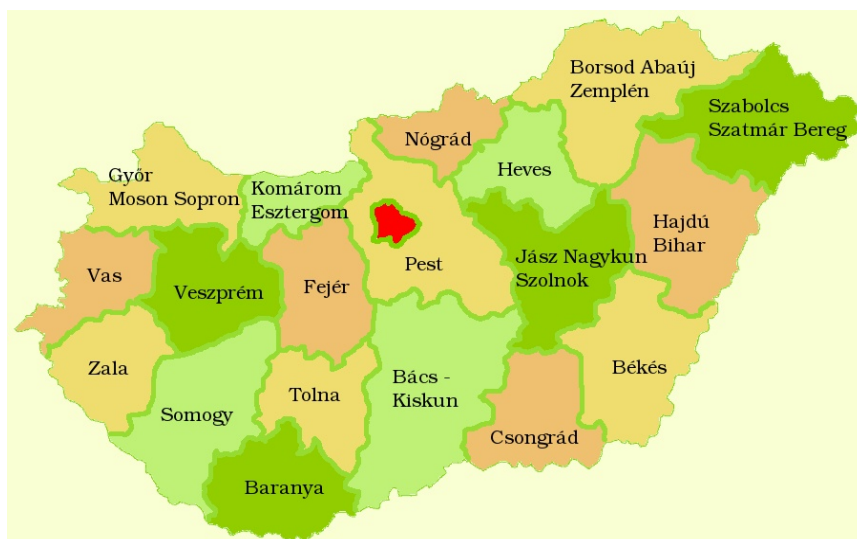
²⁵ Hungarian Central Statistical Office, ‘Counties of Hungary’, 1. January 2016, at <https://www.ksh.hu/docs/teruletiatlasz/counties.pdf>, 24. March 2018

²⁶ Eszter Nagy, Dávid Tóth, ‘Which are the poorest and richest counties in Hungary?’, 7. August 2017, at <http://www.pbkik.hu/hu/pecs-baranyai-kereskedelmi-es-iparkamara/cikkek/melyek-a-legszegeyebb-es-leggazdagabb-jarasok-magyarorszagon-74195>, 28. March 2018

²⁷ Municipal data sheet, number of inhabitants on the 1st of January 2015, at http://onkormanyzat.mti.hu/intezmeny/1313/dravapiski_kozseg_onkormanyzata, 25. March 2018

are mostly tiny villages, where for 40-80% of inhabitants of working age the public works scheme is the only employment available.²⁸

Figure 9



Counties of Hungary, at <http://abouthungary.net/hungary/hungary-counties/>, 27. March 2018

Figure 10

²⁸ Ungár Tamás, 'Our grandchildren will be public workers, too – last days of Ormánság', 30. August 2017, at <http://nepszava.hu/cikk/1139003-meg-az-unokak-is-kozmunkasok-lesznek---az-ormansag-vegnapjai>, 25. March 2018



Ungár Tamás, 'Our grandchildren will be public works participants, too – last days of Ormánság', 30. August 2017, at <http://nepszava.hu/cikk/1139003-meg-az-unokak-is-kozmunkasok-lesznek---az-ormansag-vegnapjai>, 25. March 2018

I had the chance to visit the mayor of 'Dráwapiski²⁹' and collect information from him. The village has a little shop and playground – so the situation there is already better than in some other villages. As most of the inhabitants only have four years of elementary schooling, it must be assumed they will find it difficult to write or count correctly. In the last 12 years, since the mayor has been in office, only two girls from the village succeeded to go to university. The public works program there was started in 2013 with 40 participants. Nowadays there are only 18, because the rest have moved on to the primary job market. It is evident that the programme has achieved its purpose. The big question is how. The mayor realized that training programmes do not really help, so instead, he helps young people personally to find jobs in the private sector as cleaning ladies or as manual workers. He supports launching tiny businesses which help and are connected to each other. These businesses make local products. The leadership must generate these artificially, otherwise there won't be any progress. A very good example of such a local business is DRP

²⁹ http://onkormanyzat.mti.hu/intezmeny/1313/dravapiski_kozseg_onkormanyzata, 26. March 2018

Cosmetics³⁰. It was launched in the village on the initiative of the mayor and a family doctor working in a little town in the county and they already opened their first shop in the capital city, in Budapest. They produce bio cosmetics, like soap, shower gel, bath bombs etc. in the factory operating in the village. The assembly of these does not need much in the way of skills. What makes this factory so special is that all fifteen employees are young, former programme participants, who are now working full-time.³¹

It is evident from the example of Drávapiski that it is possible for the programme to achieve results. Moreover, many other villages and towns could also escape from the treadmill of the public works system. Although the situation is very complicated, with leadership of local mayors and the cooperation of the former participants, the public works programme can become a springboard leading to real work. Such leadership requires an ability to grasp business opportunities and the discipline needed to keep things in order.

Conclusion

I have raised the example of Drávapiski to show that every problem has a solution. It is a success from a tiny village of a little county but for people who live there, these results mean everything. Why cannot it work elsewhere? My impression is that the gap between rich and poor is not unbridgeable. There will always be disparities in wealth and income and between urban and rural areas. The fight against inequality and marginalization becomes harder and harder every year. But it is still not hopeless in my opinion. Why are people born in poor families different? Why should they have less rights to obtain an education? We have to give them the chance to attend schools at all levels. Because in my opinion, education is the only way out from this aggravating situation. And yes, we must start this process, as poor people do not have the required capacity. The problem might be global, but the solution is local.

³⁰ <https://www.drpcosmetics.com>, 25. March 2018

³¹ All information from the mayor of Drávapiski, Zoltán Mali from a personal meeting in Alsómocsolád, 10. January 2018

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