

Motherhood and parenting from the perspective of social inclusion and gender equality

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1. Introduction: challenges and responses

Pregnancy, motherhood and parenthood, as well as children's rights and welfare are protected by law in Hungary.¹ At the same time, as a result of some negative economic and social developments since the regime change (increasing unemployment esp. of Roma and women, impoverishment of some parts of the population, deterioration of the childcare infrastructure, reinvigorated conservatism and ethnic prejudices, etc.), as well as following from neglect on the part of decision making, there are several problems related to these issues. Besides general (horizontal) concerns like social and human rights, social inclusion or gender equality, the following problem areas / risk groups deserve specific attention:

- **Lack of women's economic independence**, including the impoverishment of women (in this case: mothers)
- **Helplessness of single mothers**: lack of appropriate support by special means and services
- **Child poverty**: children in extremely disadvantaged situation (particularly Roma children)²
- **Domestic / partnership violence**. The existing institutional framework is designed to protect abused children, while it is unable to provide adequate protection to women. This lack, in turn, also affects children as they, too, are always implicated in gender-based (partnership) violence.

In Hungary, questions concerning the willingness to have children, pregnancy, motherhood/parenthood and childcare are approached, primarily, in terms of national interests, i.e. **demographic challenges**, as opposed to individual rights. In addition to the consequent narrowness of perspectives in interpreting related concerns, demographic challenges (aging of the population, extremely low fertility rates) are addressed inadequately by policy making. Two critical points should be underlined with respect to this complex set of misconceptions and mismanagement:

- ***Nationalistic premises in the assessment of the size of the population and its desired growth.*** Despite anxieties regarding the decrease and the aging of the population, the actual growth of certain segments of the population is not welcome. This concerns specifically the Roma minority, constituting about 5-6 per cent of the total population, that is subjected to

¹ Legislation of this field has been harmonized with EU norms. (For details see the section on legislation.)

² Child poverty since the political change of 1989 has significantly increased, and the risk of poverty is greater in the case of children as compared with the social average. (Agnes Darvas and Katalin Tausz: Child Poverty and Social Exclusion. Research report. Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor, 2003).

prejudices and mistreatment also with respect to having children.³ In other words, demographic concerns are defined not only in terms of the optimal size of the population and its constitution according to age, but also by ethnic preferences.

- ***Anti-egalitarian approach to gender issues.*** Given prevailing traditional gender stereotypes and the weak representation of women's interests, parenthood for women is especially challenging with respect to employment opportunities and making a decent livelihood.⁴ Nevertheless, notwithstanding some progress in articulating such problems at a governmental level⁵, these concerns remain marginal in tackling the fertility issue. Importantly, employment policies facilitating women's participation in the labor market and aiming at the reconciliation of domestic and workplace duties, as well as programs encouraging the equal share of home responsibilities are lacking. In sum, the implications of gender equality on population growth are not recognized.

For all these reasons, in describing the policy framework in Hungary related to the situation and prospects of pregnant women/mothers and young children, this report pays special attention to social inclusion and gender equality.

2. Legislative and policy background

The relevant legislative and policy fields concerning the prospects of pregnant women and mothers of young children include, primarily, social administration and social services, the protection of children, anti-discrimination and equal opportunities.

Social administration and services

Basic social services, including those intended for families, are regulated in the modified Social Act (of 1993) and provided by local governments. Specialized social services to help individuals in difficult social situation so that they can maintain their independent life in their own living environment and resolve problems arising from their health or mental condition or some other circumstance, are also covered here. The act makes special reference to elderly and disabled people, psychiatric patients, addicts and homeless people but not, for instance, to single mothers.

Child protection

³ Adverse anti-Roma stereotypes include the notion that Roma are willing to have children only in order to obtain social benefits (while, in reality, they have less access to such support). Roma women are often discouraged by the representatives of majority institutions (e.g. district nurses) to have children. The institutional discrimination and violence against Roma went as far as sterilizing Roma women against their will – a practice that is now explicitly prohibited by law (due to the modification of the Health Act).

⁴ According to data of the Central Statistical Office, while men spend more hours doing paid work, women do the vast majority of (unpaid) domestic duties, including childcare, and their overall workload is greater than that of men. In 95 per cent of the cases women take the (relatively long: currently 3, from April 2010 2-years-long) parental leave. As a result, women are not only effectively overloaded and miss several years from work (i.e. legal employment) but are also considered unreliable workforce by employers. (In the case of men, parenthood represents a plus in terms of their judgment as employees.)

⁵ Women's employment opportunities are (supposed to be) promoted by the recent (2009) modifications of the system of family allowances as well as by current efforts to develop the childcare infrastructure (see later).

With the Child protection act of 1997⁶, a new period started in the institutional structure of child protection and related provisions, care, and the system of tutelage. As the Child protection act is the fundamental legislation adopting the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to the national context, it interprets prevention, treatment and caring much more broadly than a narrow concept of child protection. Developing and extending the coherent system determined in the legislation, the government has supported local governments in realizing their duties also in the form of tenders. Functions and elements of child protection are structured in a way that service providing and the work of authorities, as well as the systems of basic and specialized services, are kept separately.

Anti-discrimination

The fundamentals of anti-discrimination policies are formulated in the Hungarian Constitution, the Labor Code and various legislations on social and family rights. Elements of equal opportunities policies targeting women have been present since 1996 in governance. In order to integrate all these policies in a singular framework, a compound Equal Treatment Act, harmonizing related EU directives, was passed in 2003⁷. Importantly, this act defines and prohibits direct and indirect discrimination and harassment, and protects motherhood and parenthood including the unlawful termination of employment relationship during pregnancy and maternity/parental leave. The act also provides for the establishment of the Equal Treatment Authority, an independent government body in charge of enforcing the legislation.⁸ Other agents involved in the enforcement of the equal treatment legislation include courts and other authorities like system of labor supervision.

3. Provisions for families, parents and children – from a gender perspective⁹

Provisions related to childcare and parenthood are secured by *parental leave policies* and related *family allowances*, the *system of social assistance* and the *child welfare system*. Both systems provide general and special services, the latter of which are intended for people in need. Although there are services for pregnant women and parents of young children, women are not defined in this structure as a specific risk group – in terms of social inclusion, participation in the labor market, etc. – on account of motherhood.

⁶ Act XXXI of 1997 on the protection of children and administration of tutelage, significantly modified in 2003.

⁷ Act CXXXV of 2003 on equal treatment and the promotion of equal opportunities defines several attributes (forming social groups) that must be protected, so it serves as a means of anti-discrimination and equality policies in general.

⁸ The Equal Treatment Authority is in charge of investigating discrimination complaints, support claimants, and enforce collective claims to protect individuals or groups whose rights have been violated. However, its power in retaining discriminative behavior is limited as it can only impose minor sanctions.

⁹ Data and the quantitative assessment of policies in this section are retrieved from the homepage of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor.

Parental leave and family allowances

The apparently generous system of family allowances (long period of leave, high amount of benefits and moderate restrictions on eligibility) has been virtually untouched during the past decades, as no governments took the courage to effectively transform it. The underlying assumption that children should be attended at home as long as possible by their primary care-taker, i.e. the mother (since women's social role is defined primarily by motherhood), represents a very strong stereotype. Although there were minor changes in family policies, these mostly concerned priorities regarding the respect of neediness vs. universalism (effectively: the promotion of middle class interests) in redistribution. Thus measures were fluctuating depending on the ideological affiliation of government in power, while the system itself remained essentially stable.

Currently, however, the system is undergoing significant transformation. Changes involve the reduction of the period of parental leave and imposing stricter restrictions on eligibility with respect to certain types of benefits (concerning the necessary period of insurance that is set as a precondition of eligibility). Although the stated aim of the modifications is to increase the employment of women, as opposed to budgetary savings, it is certainly not a coincidence that the reform happened to take place during the present economic crisis.¹⁰ (See more on the reforms in Section 5 below.)

Leaves and benefits

Benefits due for the period of maternity and parental leave do not take the form of paid leave, but are extended by social security or, in case of no eligibility, covered from the central budget.

For the period of maternity leave due before and after confinement (24 weeks in all), the woman is entitled to confinement benefit or child nursing support, depending on whether she was insured for a sufficient period of time (365 days in the 2 years preceding birth).¹¹ Subsequently, either child nursing fee or child nursing support can be claimed by the parent/guardian of the child. Women with 3 or more children may opt to become 'full-time mothers' and receive child nursing aid. A normative family allowance is due after each child under 20, as long as he/she attends an educational institution.

- *Confinement benefit* (TGYÁS), corresponding to 70% of the previous average earnings, is granted in the framework of the social security system to the mother in case she meets insurance requirements. It is extended for the whole period of the maternity leave, and its objective is to supplement earnings lost by the mother due to birth and nursing a young child.
- *Child nursing support* (GYES), the monthly amount of which is identical with the minimum old-age pension (around 25,000 HUF), may be established from the date of birth until the child reaches the age of 2 (longer in case the child is permanently ill or disabled). Eligibility is not

¹⁰ On changing the system of normative family allowance, 8 billion HUF is expected to be saved this year, while restrictions concerning other types of childcare support will result in reducing budgetary costs by a further 15 billion HUF by 2013. This prospect was articulated by the responsible minister right after affirming in a communication that modifications have nothing to do with budgetary savings. ("The sum of family allowance will not increase this year." MTI /Hungarian Telecommunications Bureau/, May 26, 2009.)

¹¹ Conditions of eligibility are defined under the Health Insurance Act.

associated with either employment or insurance related legal relationship, and it may concern either parent, a foster parent or a guardian (e.g. grandparent). The aim of this provision, covered from the central budget, is that the state should contribute to the living expenses of the person nursing the child.¹²

- *Child nursing fee* (GYED), also tied to insurance relationship and corresponding to 70% of the previous average earnings but maximized in 140% of the minimum wage (currently 100,000 HUF), is available for 18 months after maternity leave, until the child reaches 2 years of age. Its aim is to compensate lost earnings while nursing a young child.
- *Child nursing aid* (GYET), corresponding to the amount of child nursing support, may be claimed by the mother of 3 or more children (minors) in case she decides to stay at home (in which case she becomes a 'full-time mother').
- In addition, a normative *family allowance* is due after each child until they finish their studies in a middle level educational institution, but not after they turn 20. Its amount is about 15% of the minimum wage (12.200 HUF; the sum is slightly more in case of a single parent, and nearly the double in case of a permanently ill or disabled child). Starting from 2010, up to 50% of this benefit can be provided in kind, depending on the decision of the local notary.¹³ Furthermore, *family tax benefit* (4,000 HUF per child) can be claimed, as part of family allowance, by families with 3 or more children.

Social assistance

Besides the different types of **support and services provided for people in need** (due to health condition or socio-economic situation), the type of service within the framework of social assistance that is especially relevant here is represented by **family assistance**. This involves "the provision of general and specific help by means of social work, in order to contribute to the welfare and development of individuals, families and the local community, as well as to their ability in adopting to their social environment."¹⁴ An important tool of family assistance is represented by *district nurses* who, working closely together with local pediatricians, regularly visit parents with young children during the first 2 years to check the well-being of the child and provide information and help to parents regarding nursing. This type of service is potentially able to promote the interests of mothers/parents and influence gender relations in general by involving men/fathers in home duties, though this potential is not utilized at present. In addition, family assistance (alongside **community services** aiming at the rehabilitation of psychiatric patients) may help reducing risks of abuse and thus preventing domestic violence.¹⁵

¹² Until recently, child nursing support was tied to conditions that effectively prevented women's return to the labor market: its recipient (that is almost always the mother) could not perform earning activity until the child was 18 months old, and was allowed to work no more than 4 hours a day afterwards, unless the work was performed at home in which case no limitations applied.

¹³ This modification is part of a set of measures introduced recently that severely curtail the autonomy of socially deprived and defenseless people (esp. the Roma).

¹⁴ Home page of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor.

¹⁵ Other means within the social assistance system that may be significant from a gender equality perspective include the provision of domestic help to alleviate the burden of (mostly female) family members who assume this task.

The most important **deficiencies** of the social assistance system include the lack of adequate services for single people, specifically elderly women and young mothers, and of professional protection and rehabilitation of victims of gender violence – a task realized, to some extent, in the framework of the child welfare system.¹⁶

Child welfare system

The child protection system is crucial not only concerning the rights and welfare of children but also those of women at risk. It determines the system of financial provisions, basic services and specialized services, and it defines the tasks and responsibilities of local governments and the scope of authority of notaries. Management and professional supervision, as well as the maintenance of child-care institutions, form part of the duties of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor. Other institutions in charge of professional supervision include the Institute of Social Politics and Labor and the National Professional Committee of Child Protection.

Financial provisions

Among financial provisions relevant from the point of view of pregnant mothers (i.e. potentially influencing their decision whether to continue pregnancy) are the following:

- *Regular child protection allowance and regular child protection benefit.* Since 2006, regular child protection allowance has been integrated in normative family allowance that is a universal type of assistance. Support in kind (free meals and school books) is still linked to the entitlement for regular child protection benefit that also involves minor cash benefits (5,000 HUF twice a year).¹⁷
- *Compensatory child protection allowance.* This type of social assistance concerns the guardian (typically a grandparent) of the child receiving regular child protection benefit.¹⁸
- *Exceptional child protection allowance.* This type of allowance is provided to families struggling with temporary problems in terms of making a living.¹⁹
- *School meals and books.* 50 per cent of cost of meals is exempted if the child comes from a family with 3 or more children, or if he/she is disabled or permanently ill. Children receiving regular child protection benefit are entitled to free meals at nurseries, kindergartens and schools until the 4th grade. The same categories of children, plus those raised by a single parent, are entitled to free school books from grade 1 to 13, or while receiving professional training.

¹⁶ Provisions for victims of violence – including caring, rehabilitation and the provision of temporary home – are managed by local self-governments within the child welfare system. However, due to several failures at the state level, this serious problem is not treated effectively.

¹⁷ This type of benefit concerned 500,000 children in 2006.

¹⁸ This type of allowance concerns about 2,000 children. Its monthly sum is 22 per cent of the minimum old-age pension, beyond which 7,500 HUF is provided in cash twice a year.

¹⁹ About 200,000 children receive this type of allowance – part of which may be provided in kind (school books and equipments, alimentation, etc.) – amounting to 2 billion HUF per year.

- *Baby-bond.* Every child is entitled to a baby-bond upon birth, based on which he or she receives 40,000 HUF from the state. Children in need receive a further lump sum of 42,000 HUF at the age of 7 and 14. Unlike in the case of other forms of savings, incentives for parental contribution is provided not by individual income tax benefits but direct support adopted to the amount of savings (10 per cent of the amount paid to the account of the child but not more than 6,000 HUF a year, and 20 per cent, maximized in 12,000 HUF, in case of children in need).

Basic services

The provision of basic services pertains to the duties of local governments. Such services must contribute to the physical, mental, psychological and moral development of the child as well as secure his or her welfare and enable his or her education within the family. Services also must help in preventing and eliminating abusive situations and in avoiding children's removal from the family. Basic services provided in the framework of the child welfare system include:

- *Child welfare service* aiming at the provision of information for families with children as well as for children themselves, and the prevention and elimination of risk by means of family care, conflict management, therapeutic and other forms of activities as well as by organizing various kinds of programs.²⁰
- *Day-care of children* (nursery, family day-care, home-care) meaning the adequate supervision, care and education of children, as well as the organization of activities and the provision of meals, while parents are at work, or they are unable to take care of the child due to some other reason (like illness).
- *Temporary care of children* (temporary homes, replacing parents) involves services provided in order to secure housing and full accommodation of the child for a period of time while (because of problems related to health, lifestyle or some other reason) the parent is unable to take care of the child.

Forms of financial support listed in the section above also belong to basic child welfare services:

- regular child protection benefit
- compensatory child protection allowance
- exceptional child protection allowance

Specialized services

The development of a national system of specialized child protection services had two important objectives related to the enforcement of children's rights: the *extension of the network of foster*

²⁰ In 2006, 35 child welfare centers were operating in Hungary.

parenting and the *reconstruction of institutional care*, including its partial replacement with apartment homes.²¹

As determined in the child protection act since 2003, *special services* are provided for permanently ill or disabled children as well as children under 3 years of age, while *specialized services* are intended for children manifesting severe psychological or dissocial symptoms, or struggling with psychoactive drugs. Special and specialized child protection includes various territorially based and national services, such as:

- Professional committees of child protection in charge of determining the appropriate form of service to be provided to the child
- Maintenance of a network of foster parents²², professional tutelage, family care and posterior care
- provision of accommodation and *specialized care* (by foster parents or at institutions) as well as *posterior care*

Administration of tutelage and the protection of the child's rights

Duties related to tutelage are divided between the *notary of local government* (who deals with issues needing immediate intervention) and the *representative of child protection services* (authority of tutelage) in cities and the districts of the capital (who deals with issues requiring special expertise as well as supervision). Authorities of tutelage also coordinate programs preventing crime for children who are at risk or have committed a crime (but may not be punished). A recent institution, the *representatives of children's rights*, is responsible for protecting the legal rights of children as well as for enabling them to become familiar with, and enforce, these rights.

4. Policy results

Protection of children at risk

Since the adoption of the child protection act, the overall number of children registered as being at risk has decreased: the number of those at risk due to material factors has significantly decreased (especially owing to the introduction of regular child protection allowance and child welfare services), while the number of those endangered because of their environment or misconduct has slightly increased.²³ The number of children and families claiming services has

²¹ The capacity of apartment homes has increased almost to its double from 1998 to 2005, and about every second institutionalized child today is placed in this type of institution. The reconstruction of the system of institutional care has been more or less completed by today.

²² 53 per cent of children displaced from their original family (9,000 children) are educated by foster parents (of which there are about 5,000 in the country). The prestige and remuneration of foster parents have significantly increased during the past decade.

²³ The total number of children at risk was 380,000 in 1998 and 209,800 in 2006, out of which 112,489 was endangered because of material reasons, 131 due to environmental factors, 39,347 because of misconduct, and

grown proportionately with the extension of the service system engaged in prevention. However, the system of prevention is still deficient, and it is either inaccessible for many people living in small settlements, or the services provided are of very low professional standard.²⁴

Gender equality

The adoption of International norms (set by the UN) and especially EU integration have made gender equality an imperative policy principle in Hungary. During the late 1990s and early 2000s, several pieces of anti-discrimination legislation have been passed²⁵, and the representation of women's interests has been institutionalized.²⁶ Nevertheless, the gender perspective is not yet fully understood, nor adopted, in policy making,²⁷ and institutional means to protect women and promote their interests are insufficient. Thus, at the local level, social services are not intended to specifically address issues of gender equality,²⁸ and the existing framework of social assistance and child welfare systems have very limited capacity to resolve related problems.

Beyond providing different kinds of support and benefits essential for the maintenance of families (regular child protection benefit, compensatory child protection allowance, exceptional child protection allowance), the child welfare system is significant also for contributing to the reduction of gender inequality. This potential of the system is represented, primarily, by ensuring **day-care facilities for children** and the **protection of victims of domestic violence**.

Day-care for children

The deterioration of childcare infrastructure during the past decades represents a key factor beyond the disproportionate employment rates of women and men. In spite of some slight progress recently, services are still dissatisfactory, both from a quantitative and a qualitative point of view. Though the capacity of kindergartens/preschools is more or less sufficient at national level, the residents of small settlements are disadvantaged in terms of access. Nurseries are able to receive only 8 per cent of children between 0 and 3 years of age,²⁹ which makes it especially difficult, or even impossible, for parents (i.e. the mother) of young children to return to the labor market.

8,832 for health reasons. The number of concerned families was 90,896 in 2006. According to the data of the Central Statistical Office (CSO) of the same year, 40,000 children were victims of domestic violence and abuse.

²⁴ This is one of the reasons why the rate of children removed from their family has barely decreased (from 0.92 to 0.88 per cent during this period, as compared to the population of the same age). The placement of children in professional care has also changed significantly: while in the mid 1980s only 25 percent of them were in foster care (the rest living in institutions), this percentage has increased to 40 by 1997 and 53 by 2006.

²⁵ Relevant legislation includes the modifications of the Labor Code and social laws and the new compound legislation on equal treatment and equal opportunities (Act CXXV of 2003).

²⁶ At governmental level, the main bodies dealing with gender issues include the Office of the Social Equality of Women and Men at the Department of Equal Opportunities of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor, in charge of coordinating gender policies, and the Council of the Representation of Women's Interests, a consultative body of the government.

²⁷ Gender mainstreaming, although present in official documentation and discourse, is still an alien concept in Hungary.

²⁸ The only exception is represented by the "Houses of Chance", a network dealing with discrimination complaints that was created by Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor to comply with the equal treatment legislation.

²⁹ This figure should be compared to the 33 per cent specified in the Barcelona targets.

Protection of victims of violence

In the virtual absence of a specialized system, abused women are able to gain (some) protection and services only within the child welfare system. The **alarm system for the protection of children** (involving social services at the local government, the Authority of Tutelage, the police, etc.) and the **Temporary Homes for Families** have outstanding significance in terms of compensating for this institutional deficiency.

5. Programs and initiatives to tackle key problems

Problems related to discrimination, poverty and violence, concerning especially mothers and children, as well as gender inequality in employment and at home, have been gradually recognized as important areas of intervention by the state. Recent initiatives involve institutional developments and the introduction of incentives, rather than direct and targeted cash transfers. At the same time, the overall spending on childcare-related benefits has been significantly cut.

Measures related to coping with challenges of nursing and childcare include the following:

Promotion of women's employment opportunities

- The childcare infrastructure has been somewhat improved owing, especially, to the introduction of *family daycare* (significant particularly in small settlements) and the promotion of *integrated institutions* (including nursery and kindergarten), as well as to the legal stipulation that makes the last year of pre-school attendance compulsory.
- START and START PLUS programs help people, including those on parental leave, (re)enter in the labor market by *reducing social security contributions* paid by the employer for a period of time. The extent of reductions has increased recently.³⁰
- The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor administers *Family-Friendly Workplace Award*, awarded annually according to criteria that now explicitly include aspects of gender equality.
- Persons (mostly women) on parental leave are entitled to the *exemption from paying tuition fees* when continuing studies at university level.
- Recently (in 2009), the period of parental leave was reduced from 3 to 2 years, and conditions of eligibility to certain types of benefits became stricter (see Section 2).³¹

³⁰ Employers must pay only 10 per cent contributions in the first year and 20 per cent in the second year when employing parents (i.e. mothers) returning to work.

³¹ According to a recent survey conducted by the public opinion research institute Median, concerned people (mothers) think this measure will not increase the willingness to have children or enable the return of mothers in the labor market. Survey results by another public opinion research institute Szonda Ipsos indicate that Hungarian population is against recent measures on the grounds that a mother should stay at home with her children. (HR portal)

- Also with the latest legal modifications of 2009, a measure prescribing for employers in the public sphere to secure part-time jobs for women returning from parental leave was introduced.

Support to victims of child poverty

- A *National Program Against Child Poverty* has been launched. In its framework, there are ongoing *local projects* targeting children in especially disadvantaged areas in the framework of the current national development plan, supported by European Structural Funds. The government also operates *Children's Houses* with the aim of helping 0 to 6 years old (and especially 18 to 36 months old) disadvantaged children cope with their situation and develop their abilities and skills. The functions of Children's Houses will extend to provide services to parents, such as helping in finding employment, teaching housework and computer skills, involving them in the qualitative education of the children.
- In the case of some child welfare services (nurseries, kindergartens and family daycare institutions), a *system of bonds* will be introduced to help deprived families in the most deprived micro-regions.

Combating domestic violence

- Within the system of Temporary Homes for Families, a government model program started in 2005 to provide services for victims of domestic violence. The *Regional Network of Crisis Centers* is managed by civil foundations, social organizations and local governments, and is supported and coordinated by the Office of the Social Equality of Women and Men at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor. The program is designed to provide safe accommodation for abused people (mostly women) with or without children normally for 30 days, during which time clients receive therapy, rehabilitation services and personalized assistance.³²

6. Conclusion

Considering the European framework of demographic challenges, active inclusion and children's rights, the situation in Hungary looks fairly ambivalent:

- **Demographic challenges** represent a key concern, however, actual approaches to this problem seem to be misconceived. In particular, the fertility issue is treated inadequately as its understanding is blurred by ideological constructs based on nationalistic premises and tainted by the dominant self-interests of the middle class. Thus measures supporting the willingness to have children target primarily the well-off, while by neglecting gender equality, their efficiency is less than optimal even in this regard.

³² However, as it is not supported by legislative means, the program operates quasi-illegally on a voluntaristic basis. In addition, it copes with the lack of sufficient finances, adequate expertise and professional coordination. Thus efforts may help in providing temporary shelter to some victims of violence, however, they contribute little to resolving a problem that is far beyond the means of this institutional framework.

- In spite of significant legislative developments concerning non-discrimination, **active inclusion policies** are lacking when it comes to motherhood: since gender equality has not become a socially accepted norm, there are few proactive measures enabling women's return to the labor market, and almost none promoting the share of domestic responsibilities.
- The child welfare system has greatly improved over the past one and a half decade, however, **children's rights** are not fully respected: despite the restructuring of the protection system, no adequate services are provided for children in small settlements, and institutional abuses concerning Roma are frequent.³³

The main reasons of systemic deficiencies regarding the provision of adequate protection and services to families, parents/mothers and children have to do with both *conceptual inadequacies* and *institutional insufficiencies*. Integrated national strategies to protect specific risk groups related to parenting, especially concerning women as a social group, (female) poverty and minority women and victims of domestic violence are lacking.³⁴ Existing support systems are not sufficiently informed by values of justice and fairness, including assistance to the deprived, gender equality, anti-racism and social solidarity: Prevailing principles of governance (i.e. support of middle-classes as the 'motor' of society) and characteristics of the organizational structure (decentralization in allocating special support) are responsible for inadequacies of support systems in appropriately promoting social inclusion and equality.

³³ Many Roma children are removed from their family on account of the social situation of the family, and the arguments supporting such decisions often cite cultural difference as an explanation. (report by Maria Herczog and Maria Nemenyi, ERRC, 2008).

³⁴ A national strategy of gender equality, that might include means to combat female poverty, has been prepared by experts and is currently awaiting approval. As for domestic violence, there is no specific legislation concerning this problem, the recent legislative development regarding the order to restrain perpetrators from approaching victims, has not proved effective, and the institutional framework to combat gender-based violence is inefficient in its present design.