

[2013]

Development of a nation-wide supporting  
infrastructure for rural women:  
**National network of local women centers**

Policy recommendations



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**The Publication is Co-financed by the Swiss Hungarian Cooperation Programme**



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## Summary

During 2012-2013 a research was carried out to collect information about the existing NGOs and state services providing any kind of help for women. The focus was primarily on rural women. The results of the research can be found here:

<http://www.reginakozpont.hu/haz/files/noiterekkutatasfinalangol.pdf>

Based on the research, carried out in the project, we propose a systematic intervention in order to build a backbone of a national structure to support rural women, victims of domestic violence and to prevent trafficking.

We see the problem as being structural, moreover the intention of the law makers is still missing to tackle the issue. Therefore we suggest a step-by-step approach in which a supportive system can be developed based on the current structural resources and with a bottom-up approach.

This policy recommendation is based on the following assumptions and facts:

- Sufficient Hungarian state measures to prevent trafficking are not likely to be implemented in the next few years.
- Poverty is growing and the status of women is getting worse nationwide.
- These together will contribute to the increase of trafficking.
- Money available through international sources, e.g. Swiss Fund, Norwegian Fund are the only sources that are available for this kind of work. Even the money coming from the EU funds and going through the Hungarian state planning and distribution is not spent on sufficiently improve women's situation. We saw that in the previous EU budget period and also now in the current planning period for the next budget term.
- International lobby support is needed to join Hungarian NGOs in order to put enough pressure on Hungarian politicians.

As a result of the above assumptions and facts, this policy recommendation is targeted to organisations and individuals of all social levels (local, national, international) who have interest in the bottom-up development of a supporting infrastructure for rural Hungarian women. In the first phase, a two-year development project is recommended.

## Background

Currently there are no sufficient state or NGO structures, systems, measures and resources to systematically support rural women, women victims of violence, prostitution and trafficking.

- There is no specific and up-to-date database or service list of NGOs, shelters and specialized services available for women. This is especially true outside the

capital. Most of the NGOs are isolated from each other and maintain low level of cooperation amongst themselves.

- These NGOs and communities can be characterized as being small, weak and almost completely lack of funding necessary for continuous operation and sustainable services.
- There are many areas which are not covered by these NGOs. Women with multiple disadvantages can almost never gain access to their infrastructure and services. In our research we did not include for-profit organizations, since they do not offer available services for women with multiple disadvantages.
- The governmental infrastructure is almost completely invisible and out of reach for most. The 24-hour free emergency hotline of OKIT has to reject women looking for help, because of the lack of available spaces in the shelters. Additionally, this system does not offer adequate protection for women. If the shelters have free spaces for victims, women can only stay there for 30 days, and they have to travel to the shelter from their own money, which they often do not have, when escaping from a violent environment. The combination of these two means that most of the fugitive victims are not able to get help from this system. (Detailed description of the system of OKIT, which aims to help women who are victims of domestic violence, is included in the research document.)

## Development plan based on the research analysis and field experience

Currently there is no professional network to systematically help rural women in Hungary, with the wide range of services and support women need.. However, there are networks and service providers which can act as seeds and basis for a successful and efficient system.

These are:

- The Maternal and Child Health Nurse Service,
- 26 NGOs from the countryside which were mapped during this study and willing to form a network,
- members of REGNET (<http://regnet-nohalozat.hu/>)
- two identified shelters for prostitutes,
- members of Mother Centers' Network in Hungary,

<http://anyakozpontok.blogspot.hu/>

- The Hungarian Women's Lobby and its member organizations.  
(<http://noierdek.hu/>)

One of the essential statements of the research is that these organizations and the entire system are not yet ready to act as a professional system, neither in relation to being a network, nor as being well organized. However, they can act as a solid foundation for development. This working network of services can be achieved by a two year session of training and network development.

The different elements of the proposed network are:

- easy access of information for local women and mothers,
- counseling opportunities in relation to social services,
- trainings to support reintegration into the labor market (localized for the individual geographic area),
- counseling support for reintegration to the labor market (legal, social security, HR, other),
- collecting and displaying local job opportunities,
- counseling and empowerment of local entrepreneurs,
- healthcare, prevention,
- counseling for women who are victims of violence and supplying them with information,
- community work aimed at helping social integration and local autonomy,
- improving the community and social services by including available local resources,
- advocacy, lobbying and local media campaigns, awareness raising.

The development of the network should happen within a two-year period. During the first two years 5-10-20 organization would be participating in a systematic development, the exact number depends on the availability of funds. These organizations might be either invited or be selected through open tenders, preferably representing every region of the country.

## Elements of the project:

### **1. Trainings for local experts, employees of the local social sector and entrepreneurs who are helping the local community.**

Trainings would be modular, depending on the needs of particular organizations, their needs and potentials. Trainings would contain elements which they found useful in the local context. This would be a basis for a series of trainings, with special training methods. It would be common in all trainings that they would be gender sensitive and they all would have a special gender highlight. All modules would be altered to be specially gender related. A large part of these modules - those associated with social economy and public entrepreneurship - are already developed by the REGINA Foundation as a part of a different project, therefore we already have a 15 hour module ready. The following topics would be included into the training: gender sensitive rural development, improving community based local resources, civic management, reintegration of the women workforce from a gender perspective, civil entrepreneurship, rural business development, social services, violence against women, domestic violence.

### **2. Network Development**

The project would help not only the participating network partners, but also the network itself would be further developed. The individual local organizations would receive infrastructural help and the project may help them manage their upkeep costs better. Also, the standard infrastructural and communication protocols would be established, which could help the network grow stronger and be more sustainable. As part of the process, a special mentoring element would be included, which aims to support the coordination of the members.

### **3. Networking with the Swiss partner organizations**

This part of work includes know-how exchange, exchange of experiences, brainstorming about methods and best practices to support exploited prostitutes in Switzerland, coming from impoverished backgrounds. This also means trying to find ways and channels to integrate women into the society with the support of the network.

We are fully aware of how ambitious this vision is, and also that there is a huge amount of time and work to be carried out to reach this vision. In the

framework of this development we do not aim to reach social reintegration of women currently being left alone by the society. But we do aim to develop an infrastructure and a network that has knowledge and intention to further develop itself and prepare to provide better and better services step by step.



# Outline of development project costs<sup>1</sup>

Projected costs for the first two years of the project

Items	Cost for one participating organization (HUF) <sup>2</sup>	Cost for one participating organization (EUR) <sup>3</sup>	For 5 participating organizations (HUF)	For 10 participating organizations (HUF)	For 20 participating organizations (HUF)	For 5 participating organizations (EUR)	For 10 participating organizations (EUR)	In case of 20 participating organizations (EUR)
Training costs (60 hour training 4*15 hour modules)	700 000	2 333	3 500 000	7 000 000	14 000 000	11 667	23 333	46 667
Costs of mentoring	200 000	667	1 000 000	2 000 000	4 000 000	3 333	6 667	13 333
Funds allocated to network development	800 000	2 667	4 000 000	8 000 000	16 000 000	13 333	26 667	53 333
<sup>4</sup> Project Coordination	300 000	1 000	1 500 000	3 000 000	6 000 000	5 000	10 000	20 000
Travel fees (entire project)			2 000 000	4 000 000	8 000 000	6 667	13 333	26 667
Publication, learning materials (entire project)			600 000	800 000	1 000 000	2 000	2 667	3 333
Network infrastructure development and maintenance (during the whole project)			2 400 000	3 000 000	4 000 000	8 000	10 000	13 333
<b>Total:</b>			<b>15 000 000</b>	<b>27 800 000</b>	<b>53 000 000</b>	<b>50 000</b>	<b>92 667</b>	<b>176 667</b>

<sup>1</sup> This is only an approximate outline

<sup>2</sup> All sum are without VAT

<sup>3</sup> 1 EUR = 300 HUF

<sup>4</sup> Project management administration

## Policy recommendations for different policy levels

The policy level recommendations include intervention in several levels of the society structure. The improvement of women's situation is a complex issue, as women suffer from all kinds of structural and individual violence. Traditions and customs also hold women back from their full potential, social and economic security. Moreover different groups of women often suffer from multiple discrimination especially in poor, rural areas.

In the proposed network development work, the basic elements of the network are the women spaces operating in the communities. These are grass-root organisations with professional background in gender and rural development related areas. Being part of the local community, moreover being managed and operated by local women, these places are the hot spots of the work. These women's spaces provide their services towards the community and they are also the ones which collect onsite experiences and information about the situation of women. Therefore they act on both individual and policy levels.

Collected information is channelled towards national lobbying organisations through the network, and national organisations (such as for example the Hungarian Women's Lobby), can advocate women's needs and interest towards policy makers.

### *Issues and messages that are advocated in the local women's spaces*

#### **State level aims:**

- The intention of law makers must be present to tackle violence against women.
- Sufficient legal framework and supporting structures have to be implemented.

#### **City/village level aims:**

- Trained, aware and conscious local decision makers and opinion leaders are needed and cooperation must be promoted among the current role players of the social and NGO systems.
- Local media and community networks must be informed about women's issues. Latency of these issues must be uncovered, including labour market problems, social services shortages and male violence against women and children.
- School and kindergarten staff must get trainings to be aware and ready to help kids being raised in families where domestic violence is present.
- Social workers, NGO helpers must be trained also.

#### **Individual level**

- Women's issues have to be made visible and openly covered in the community discussion, especially in the women's spaces. Open discussions have to be promoted in secure spaces.
- Victims of domestic violence must be informed about the supporting structures and provided a secure supporting system.

- Women must be able to reach information about all forms of violence potentially effecting them.
- Self-help groups of victims must be promoted and supported with space and information.
- Family, friend helpers of victims and also the general public must be informed about the issue.
- Victim blaming has to become visible and fought against.

## Structure of the proposed network

The proposed network is a bottom-up structure built up from local women's spaces.

Principles and ideas behind the development:

- Women themselves are the best experts of their own lives.
- If resources, space and information are available, women and women's communities are the best stakeholders to address women's problems deriving from gender inequalities.
- Subsidiarity<sup>5</sup> is a desired major principle to follow.
- The role of policy makers is to provide equal opportunities for women to access power, resources and information and to tackle the historical inequalities between women and men. Their role is also to provide legal and economic measures to eliminate male violence against women and children. If these inequalities will be eliminated women can take care of themselves in the best possible ways.

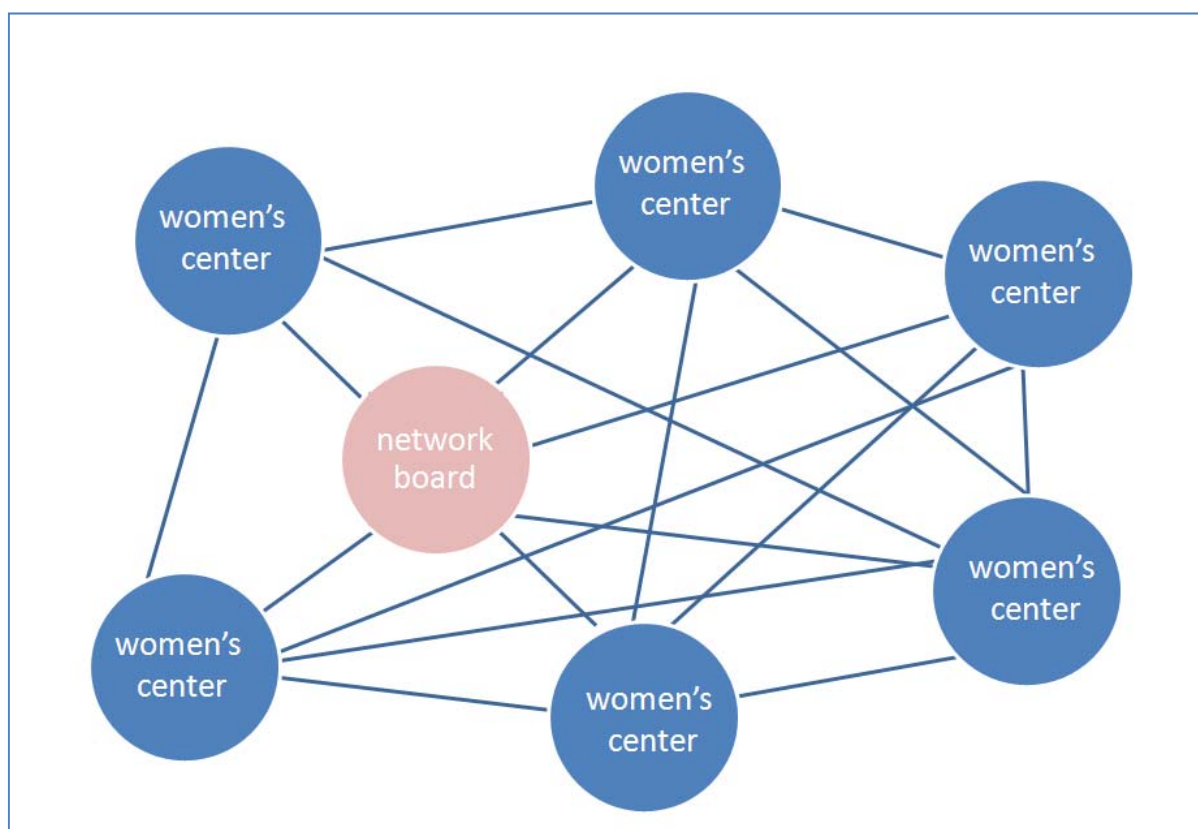
Following the above principles the network development includes the strengthening and training of already existing NGOs, women spaces, women's communities throughout the country.

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<sup>5</sup> resource: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subsidiarity>:

Subsidiarity is an organising principle of decentralisation, stating that a matter ought to be handled by the smallest, lowest, or least centralised authority capable of addressing that matter effectively. The Oxford English Dictionary defines subsidiarity as the idea that a central authority should have a subsidiary function, performing only those tasks which cannot be performed effectively at a more immediate or local level.

The structure of the network is going to look like this:



Structure of the network

The network consists of local women spaces and a board is responsible for the coordination. Each centre nominates one delegate to the board.

## Major characteristics of the women's spaces

### Features

- located in the heart of the community
- easily accessible by the members of the community
- open space for all women with or without children
- tolerant, safe and secure space
- announced opening hours
- announced services
- run and managed by the women
- advised names: Women House, Mother Center, Women's Center
- the name suppose to reflect the opinion and will of the local women, it does not have to be uniform throughout the network

- trained staff and volunteers in terms of gender and gender related difficulties of women including: labour market issues, social services, violence against women, structural violence against women, local information and services available in the community
- independence from all political parties and religious groups

### *Activities of the spaces*

- open house with previously announced opening hours
- women are welcome to pop in to rest, have a coffee or tea, to change nappies of the kids, to breastfeed
- trainings, courses
- counselling and consultancy services (legal, entrepreneurial, book keeping, labour market, social services, physical and mental health, local information, violence against women, etc.)
- self support groups
- community events
- clubs, circles

## **Running and maintaining a Women Center**

The following recommendations are based on the onsite experiences of REGINA Foundation collected during its 11 years of operation, moreover the experiences of members of the Hungarian Mother Center's Network.

REGINA was founded in 2002, the first group started to organise itself in 2003. The first REGINA House opened its doors in 2006 in Gödöllő. By 2013 REGINA proved to become sufficient and sustainable in terms of funding and operation. Based on available local resources, the extensive volunteer work of the local women's community and the social capital gained during the last years REGINA continuously offers the following services to the local community:

- trainings, courses
- consultancy, counselling
- clubs, circles
- women entrepreneurship development
- labour market reintegration support
- organic garden (permaculture based)
- charity shop
- garage sales
- summer children's camps
- school programs (education)
- local media and advocacy work

- lobbying work
- research

We see all these services as essential or very advised to become fully integrated organisation of the women's local community. The variety of the services, especially in a smaller town or village, is important because these are all gates to the local women and their very diverse needs and problems. At the same time these services are also the tools and carriers of the women's own individual empowerment processes. This rainbow of services provides the platform for the REGINA Women's House to be able to be open and tolerant, as every women can find something there which may be useful for her if she wants to join. Therefore we think that the diversity of the services is very important. The practical experience shows that the fact that there is an open space is enough for women to join. They come with ideas and initiatives. It is than the role of the management to incorporate these community intentions into the processes of the Center and fit them into the resource structure of the organisation.

### *Service structure of a women center*

**The core of the women centers is to provide space in which personal and community development can take place.** These spaces can be real, virtual and also mental. What we mean by mental space is that currently Hungary is not a secure place in terms of psychological needs of an individual. Women struggle from all kinds of social and traditional expectations and structural violence. The household work is mostly the responsibility of the women and there is a growing political pressure on them to give birth. Single earner families are rare and even in those families financial dependence of women is huge. The Hungarian labour market is not open and available for those rural women who have kids, part time jobs are not widely available and childcare services are not harmonized with the working hours of fulltime jobs. In rural communities the black economy and the women's informal communities are the major resources that support the everyday struggles of women with children. In these circumstances an open space with gender sensitive and gender aware women's community can give a boost to the local processes that are already taking place.

Therefore the main focus areas of the managements of the centers are:

1. making sure that the spaces are kept in operation
2. coordinating and harmonising the initiatives of women of the local community, and by that contributing to the development of these individuals
3. fundraising to provide the financial resources necessary to maintain the spaces
4. making sure that gender awareness and continous gender training is taking place within the organisation
5. making sure that the tolerant and non-judgemental atmosphere remains respected by all members of the community

6. gender sensitive community development, based on the assets and social capital available in the community

If all the above is fulfilled, then the environment is ready to act as secure space for women and their activities. In ecological terms the women centers act as habitats in which life can flourish. Managers are responsible to sustain the habitat, and the community as a whole is responsible to fill it up with content. The smooth cooperation between the two different activity areas is essential to reach sustainability. In the history of the development of REGINA it has been the most challenging task to carry out.

### *Financing the women centers*

The classic women center needs the following **minimal infrastructure**:

#### Infrastructure that require continuous financing:

- a centrally located community space with at least 3 large rooms (1 for women, 1 for kids, 1 kitchen)
- ideally it has a garden with a playground for kids, and a fireplace for adults
- 1 full time and 1 part-time staff

#### Infrastructure that do not require continuous financing:

- program coordinators (volunteers)
- consultants (volunteers)
- media coverage (free social media platforms are perfect)

In ideal situations the local Municipality provides the space free of charge and the community is responsible to maintain it and cover the maintenance costs. In Miskolc the Mother Center called Holdam Udvar was established like that. Members of the community renovated the space and organise their operation in a way that they are able to pay the utilities (e.g. special, fee based events). In Gödöllő, the REGINA House is a private property and REGINA can use it free of charge, but the organisation is responsible to pay the utilities, which is also covered by fee based services, charity sales and project funds (when available).

In Gödöllő there is one full time staff member, her salary is covered by project funding currently.

Other running costs (bank, accountant, phone, internet) are covered by either fee based services or project money when available.

One of the key factors of this type of operation is that services are often provided by women for whom, offering these community services, also mean either personal and/or carrier development.

Applying asset based community development<sup>6</sup> is a very effective method in the development of women spaces and empowerment work. At the same time very often this also relates to the entrepreneurship development of women.

Based on the above mentioned structures and infrastructures, women centers can maintain a sustainable operation. In addition to these, project based fundraising can also be a good tool to expand the service structure of the centers.

### *Annual costs of running a Women Center*

	per month (HUF)	annually (HUF)	per month (EUR)	annually (EUR)
<b>utilities of the center (heating, electricity, water)</b>	100000	1200000	333	4000
<b>1 part time staff member net salary</b>	100000	1200000	333	4000
<b>1 part time staff member taxes all</b>	100000	1200000	333	4000
<b>1 full time staff member net salary</b>	200000	2400000	667	8000
<b>1 full time staff member taxes all</b>	200000	2400000	667	8000
<b>other running costs</b>	30000	360000	100	1200
<b>total:</b>	<b>730000</b>	<b>8760000</b>	<b>2433</b>	<b>29200</b>

That means that running a women center in a professional way do not cost more than 30.000 Euro annually.

Therefore we recommend and propose, that after a 2\*2 years of development and financing of the centers, they can become as strong as they can at least 50 % finance themselves. The other 50% should be financed by the state or the municipality as part of the social and welfare system.

### *In the current policy recommendation we propose the following work and financial plan*

Year 1-2: Network development according to the budget detailed in the first part of the document

Year 3-4: The centers are already open and financed by project or external sources

From year 5: 50% is funded by the center, 50% is funded by the Municipality

<sup>6</sup> forrás: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asset-based\\_community\\_development](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asset-based_community_development)

Asset-based community development (ABCD) is a methodology that seeks to uncover and use the strengths within communities as a means for sustainable development.



During the first 4 years an extensive lobbying work has to be carried out at all levels to get the support of the local and national levels. In this work international help is needed from the Swiss partners and others.

## **Conclusions**

Even if gender equality is a stated aim of both the European Union and Hungary, the effective development is not really happening. During the last 10-15 years there was a lot of EU money spent on projects. Similarly to the roma programs these projects failed to result a national system and infrastructure that is essential to be in place to continuously contribute to gender equality. In the current project and policy recommendation a systematic development approach has been introduced. Based on the 10+ years experience of REGINA in the field of gender sensitive rural development we are confident that such a systematic approach at such low costs can serve effectively and significantly contribute to gender equality. NGOs, rural initiatives, knowledge and expertise are all available in Hungary. The policy level intention and funding are the only resources to build such a supporting network. Even if it sounds strange, trafficking of Hungarian young women to Switzerland and other counties may be a trigger for decision makers, organisations or individuals to make commitment to effectively try to tackle the issue of women's difficulties including poverty, trafficking and prostitution.

## **Photos illustrating some of the services and activities of a Women Center**

## Trainings, educational activities / Képzések, oktatási tevékenység





## Community events / Közösségi események





## Self esteem development, self-knowledge / Önbizalom fejlesztés, önismeret



## Health programs / Egészségvédelmi programok





## School programs / Iskolai programok





## Advocacy / Érdekképviselési munka





## Supporting women's entrepreneurship / Nők vállalkozásainak fejlesztése





## Kids' programs, camps / Gyerekprogramok, táborok

