

Employment and Unemployment in Hungary based on Census-Type Surveys*

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The study summarises the major changes in the economic activity, inactivity and employment of the population between 2001 and 2011; it also cites earlier census and microcensus data. The changes of the labour market are illustrated by means of key demographic and employment variables. When presenting the special characteristics of employment and unemployment, the author focuses on the 2011 census results.

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Employment.

Occupation.

Economy.

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Censuses provide an excellent opportunity to analyse the “world of work” and the developments in the labour market that are strongly connected to socio-economic conditions and responsive to changes. Official enumerations of the population clearly indicate how certain factors have altered over past decades, and which of them have undergone radical social transformations.

Censuses contain information for a reference date. For the 2011 census, it was 1 October 2011. Hence, most data of the present study refer to this date. Significant changes in the labour market may occur in only relatively long periods, but there may be time intervals when some of its segments alter faster. Therefore, the paper also makes reference to shorter periods between censuses. Nevertheless, over the past decades, it has become common practice to conduct census-type microcensuses covering 2% of the population, usually in the middle of the ten-year period. Their data collection programmes and methodological solutions are essentially the same as those of censuses. Thus, in respect of some labour market variables (e.g. economic activity), the 1996 and 2005 microcensus results are also cited.

The study summarises the major changes in the economic activity, inactivity and employment of the population between 2001 and 2011, referring also to the data of earlier censuses and microcensuses. However, when presenting the specific features of employment and unemployment, the emphasis is placed on the 2011 census results.

1. Changes in economic activity

Economic activity and employment can be examined from the perspective of a century.¹

When evaluating economic activity changes, one must consider that the two world wars took place in the period, and radical socio-economic changes affected the composition of the population.

Economic activity and employment may be considerably influenced by the changes in economic cycles, the labour market regulations of the government, social

¹ Census, microcensus as well as updated population data and continuous labour statistics were used for the analysis. For retrospective compilations, the conceptual differences of the various data collection and processing methods of censuses also have to be taken into account and thus, estimates have to be made in some cases. Data are given for the present territory of the country.

policy as well as the steps taken to improve the chances of disadvantaged groups. Due to the particularly open Hungarian economy, international economic relations also influence the country's labour situation.

In the first decades of the 20th century, the majority of the Hungarian population were dependants having no identifiable regular income; their proportion was 52.8% even in 1949. This ratio had dropped by 1960, and the percentage of employed persons and inactive earners² reached nearly 70% by the end of the 1980s. Later, the emergence of open unemployment followed by mass unemployment brought a new economic restructuring.

The proportion of inactive earners grew dynamically throughout the whole period but especially in the decades after 1960. At present, the share of this category within the total population is 27 times larger than it was at the beginning of the century and has increased nearly sevenfold since 1960.

Table 1

Economic activity, 1900–2011
(percentage)

Year	Population	Employed *	Unemployed	Inactive earner	Dependant
1900	100.0	41.4	..	1.1	57.5
1910	100.0	40.1	..	1.2	58.7
1920	100.0	44.6	..	1.3	54.1
1930	100.0	43.0	..	2.0	55.0
1941	100.0	45.1	..	2.2	52.7
1949	100.0	44.4	..	2.8	52.8
1960	100.0	47.8	..	4.4	47.8
1970	100.0	48.3	..	13.5	38.2
1980	100.0	47.3	..	20.6	32.1
1990	100.0	43.6	1.2	25.6	29.5
1996	100.0	34.2	4.7	32.5	28.5
2001	100.0	36.2	4.1	32.4	27.3
2005	100.0	38.1	4.6	30.5	26.7
2011	100.0	39.7	5.7	29.7	24.9

* Employed persons excluding the following: working pensioners between 1900 and 1970; working pensioners and working recipients of childcare provision in 1980 and 1990.

Note. 1996 and 2005 data are microcensus results. Here and in the tables hereafter, the deviations from 100.0 result from rounding.

² Inactive earners are economically inactive persons who receive incomes (pension, social provisions, etc.) other than unemployment benefits.

The strong increase in the number and proportion of inactive earners was essentially due to two factors: the extension of pension rights and a shift in the demographic structure towards the elderly. Only a very small proportion of workers had jobs at the beginning of the last century where they could acquire pension rights. The extension of such rights to a wide range of people started only in the 1920s and 1930s. The process later continued, and the vast majority of employees became eligible for a pension in the 1970s. Meanwhile, the age structure also changed: only 2.8% of the population were pensioners in the middle of the 20th century, 13.5% in 1970 and more than a quarter in 2011.

The level of economic activity changed slightly in the decades before and after the turn of the millennium. The percentage of inactive earners in the population increased between 1990 and 1996 and then, after five-year stagnation, decreased from 2001 to 2011. The latter was one of the consequences of the transformed pension system.

In line with European trends, the Hungarian retirement age has been raised, and the eligibility for disability pension has been tightened, reducing the economic inactivity of the age groups over 55 and extending their presence in the labour market. The growth was more significant in the case of women. Although the retirement age was gradually raised (from 55 to 62 for women and from 60 to 62 for men), the process had already completed by the time of the 2011 census. Further to this, the retirement age was increased from 62 to 65 in 2010 with a considerably shorter transition period than earlier, however, this did not substantially affect the economic activity figures of the 2011 census.

The proportion of the employed was 41.4% in 1900 then slightly decreased in the first decade of the 20th century. There was a temporary increase in the periods of the two world wars. Between them, and then in 1949, a decline was experienced. In the 1950s, the employment rate increased by more than an unprecedented three percentage points. The positive trend continued in the 1960s and also the first half of the 1970s; however, the growth (that was in the order of millions) strongly decelerated. The process stopped around the mid-1970s, and then a gradual decline was observed from the end of the decade. The decline can be attributed to two factors: a decrease in the number of working-age population and that a much smaller number of people over retirement age continued to be active earners than earlier. Thus, the fall in the number and proportion of employed people could already be detected in the decade before the economic and social transition. This process considerably accelerated in the 1990s. The employment rate fell by nearly four percentage points between 1980 and 1990, and by more than nine percentage points in the first half of the 1990, in which, besides unemployment, the early retirement schemes (disability pension, early old-age pension and pre-pension) and the exclusion of certain disadvantaged groups from the labour market played a significant role. Some 3.5 million people

were active earners in 1996, which represented a decrease of 1.6 million and more than 1 million compared with the figures 15-20 and 6 years earlier, respectively. Thus, the number of the employed was 600 thousand lower than in 1949 and did not even reach the level of 1930. In the last one and a half decades, there was a slight positive shift, the proportion of employed persons grew by five percentage points: nearly 3.94 million people were active earners in 2011.

The number of inactive earners and dependants per 100 employed people shows the changes in economic activity and offers an opportunity for further findings. (See Table 2.)

Table 2

Indicators of economic activity, 1900–2011

Year	Inactive earners	Dependants	<i>Inactive earners and dependants</i>
	per 100 employed people		
1900	3	139	142
1910	3	146	149
1920	3	121	124
1930	5	128	133
1941	5	117	122
1949	6	119	125
1960	9	100	109
1970	28	79	107
1980	43	68	111
1990	59	67	129*
1996**	95	84	193*
2001	90	76	176*
2005**	80	70	162*
2011	75	63	152*

* Including unemployed people.

** Data of microcensuses.

The number of inactive earners and dependants per 100 employed people shows that the dependency burden on employed people fluctuated significantly during the 20th century, depending on socio-economic conditions. The figure was between 140 and 150 in the years before the First World War, considerably fell after 1918, and then, in the period of the economic crisis (around 1930) increased again but did not reach the level of 1910. Its 1941 figure already indicated the boom associated with

the beginning of the Second World War, and there was only a minor shift in 1949 compared with this. Its decline (from 125 to 109) also shows a profound change in the 1950s. The indicator reached its minimum in the first half of the 1970s and then started to increase again, reaching 129 in 1990 and 193 in 1996. Both unfavourable values are partly due to unemployment. Finally, as a consequence of the changes taking place between 1996 and 2011, a slightly improving, downward trend could be measured. The number was 152 in 2011, which shows a decrease compared with the figure in 1996, but it is still significantly higher than that in 1990.

1.1. Economic activity according to gender

A hundred years ago, three-quarters of the economically active population were men. This proportion changed little until the middle of the 20th century, although a temporary increase in the percentage of women could be observed during the two world wars. This was not due to the long-lasting needs related to socio-economic development but to the fact that women had to fill the jobs of men who had been called up for military service. The extraordinary conditions of war proved that the female population could be taken into account as a considerable labour force reserve. After the First World War, the proportion of women among employed people decreased by nearly four percentage points. The decline was owing to the higher rate of unemployment of women than that of men during the economic crisis of the interwar period when mostly women were dismissed during layoffs. The percentage of men among employed people was 71% even in 1949 and only 57% in 1980.

Table 3

Economic activity by gender, 1900–2011

Year	Number of			
	men	women	employed persons among	
	among 100 employed persons		100 men	100 women
1900	74.8	25.2	62.2	20.8
1910	77.9	22.1	62.7	17.7
1920	70.2	29.8	64.6	25.8
1930	73.9	26.1	65.0	22.0
1941	72.7	27.3	67.0	24.1
1949	70.8	29.2	65.4	25.0
1960	64.5	35.5	63.9	32.8

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Year	Number of			
	men	women	employed persons among	
	among 100 employed persons		100 men	100 women
1970	58.8	41.2	58.6	38.6
1980	56.6	43.4	55.3	39.9
1990	55.5	44.5	50.4	37.4
1996*	55.6	44.4	39.7	29.1
2001	54.3	45.7	41.3	31.6
2005*	54.1	45.9	43.4	33.3
2011	53.3	46.7	44.5	35.3

* Data of microcensuses.

In consequence of the aforementioned processes, the economic activity of men decreased gradually at first, then, in the first half of the 1990s, at a very rapid pace. Its level was much lower in 1996 than at any time since the beginning of the century. The past few years have resulted in only modest improvement.

The economic activity of women also fell significantly in the 1990s; it did not even reach the level of 1960 in the mid-1990s, although it was still considerably higher than that in the first half of the 20th century. Compared with the 1980s, the composition of employed people by gender only changed slightly, the percentage of women increased from 43% in 1980 to 47% in 2011.

1.2. Economic activity by age group

The transition has influenced the various age groups in different ways. The proportion of the youngest (15–19 year-old) people decreased rapidly after 1990 and was hardly detectable in 2011 (0.5%). Two of the main reasons for this drop were the extended study time and the change in the compulsory school age from 14 to 18 years. Another reason was the increasing difficulties of career starters in finding a job after 1990. In contrast, the proportion of the 20–24 year-olds grew in the first half of the 1990s since the birth rate was high in the early years of the 1970s.

The changes in the pension system influenced the employment of people over 50. The rate of employment among them reached its lowest in 1996, and then rose gradually until 2011. The rise was especially outstanding among women.

The employment rate of people aged 15 to 19 years drastically fell due to the reasons already outlined. While the ratio was 33.3% in 1990, it was only 13.6% in 1996 and 3.3% in 2011, as a consequence of the rising compulsory school age.

The rate of employment decreased among people aged 20 to 24 years. It was more than three-quarters in 1980, 72.2% in 1990 and less than 55% in 1996. The negative trend also continued over the past one and a half decades: only about two-fifths (40.8%) of them had a job in 2011. Meanwhile, especially in the post-1990 years, a large proportion of people aged around 20 years were engaged in full-time tertiary education. It is also a common phenomenon that those who had obtained a secondary school-leaving certificate but were not admitted to tertiary education for the first time, or could not immediately continue their studies due to financial, family reasons, return to the “world of study” after one or two years spent in the “world of work”. Many young university or college graduates had to face the problem of finding a job in the decade following the turn of the millennium.

The level of employment also declined in the 25–29 age group between 1980 and 1996 but later started to increase; nearly 70% of them were economically active in 2011. Due to the efforts to acquire the highest possible educational attainment and the postponement of academic semesters, full-time studies may last even beyond the age of 25. The employment stagnation of the 25–29 year-old group on a level lower than that in 1990 is mainly explained by unemployment. However, it is also affected by the delayed childbearing of women who temporarily leave the labour market and make use of the state support (child home care allowance, childcare benefit, child raising support).

People aged 30–39 and 40–49 years are considered to most active ones. In these two age groups, the employment rate was around 88% in 1990 then dropped to 70–72% in 1996 before increasing to 74–77% by 2011. As far as women are concerned, more than 90% of them in 30–39 age group and 87% in the 40–49 age group were employed in 1980. (For men, these proportions were 98% and 94%, respectively.)

The rate of decline in employment in the 1990s and that of “recovery” were similar for middle-aged men and women. However, the employment rate of men aged 40 to 49 years decreased more than that of women of the same age. In addition to unemployment, it is also related to the fact that mostly men worked in such wound down areas (mining, metallurgy) where many of them took early retirement due to disability.

The decline in the employment rate of 50–54 and 55–59 year-old men and 50–54 year-old women – that started in the 1980s and became notable in the 1990s – is explained by widespread early retirement. Later, after 2001, the rates for the same age groups became higher due to the changes in the pension system (i.e. increase in the retirement age).

Table 4

Employment rate by age group and gender, 1990–2011
(percentage)

Age group	Year				
	1990	1996	2001	2005	2011
Both male and female					
14	0.1	0.0	–	–	–
15–19	33.3	13.6	8.3	3.8	3.3
20–24	72.2	54.7	51.3	43.3	40.8
25–29	78.3	62.6	65.8	68.7	69.3
30–39	87.7	70.0	70.7	72.7	74.3
40–49	87.6	71.6	71.4	73.9	77.1
50–54	73.7	52.5	61.7	65.6	71.0
55–59	31.0	18.3	30.7	45.1	54.2
60–64	2.7	2.0	6.6	12.6	16.5
65–69	1.1	0.7	2.6	5.0	7.9
70–	0.3	0.2	1.0	1.2	1.8
Total	43.6	34.2	36.2	38.1	39.7
Male					
14	0.1	0.0	–	–	–
15–19	34.9	12.8	9.7	4.4	3.7
20–24	84.5	61.7	56.5	47.8	44.6
25–29	93.3	76.2	76.1	79.0	76.1
30–39	93.8	77.6	77.9	81.8	83.1
40–49	90.6	73.0	71.9	75.6	78.5
50–54	80.5	61.4	63.4	66.4	70.8
55–59	60.3	34.3	46.3	53.1	59.3
60–64	4.0	3.5	9.7	16.5	20.2
65–69	1.7	1.0	3.9	7.5	10.6
70–	0.6	0.3	1.8	2.2	3.3
Total	50.4	39.7	41.3	43.4	44.5

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Age group	Year				
	1990	1996	2001	2005	2011
	Female				
14	0.1	–	–	–	–
15–19	31.5	14.4	6.9	3.2	2.8
20–24	59.3	47.4	45.9	38.6	36.8
25–29	62.9	48.4	55.2	58.0	62.2
30–39	81.5	62.3	63.3	63.4	65.3
40–49	84.6	70.3	70.9	72.2	75.7
50–54	67.8	44.5	60.2	64.9	71.1
55–59	5.9	5.2	17.4	38.3	49.7
60–64	1.7	0.9	4.2	9.6	13.4
65–69	0.7	0.4	1.7	3.3	5.8
70–	0.2	0.1	0.6	0.7	1.0
Total	37.4	29.1	31.6	33.3	35.3

The Hungarian labour market faced significant changes in the 1990s. In the first half of the decade, the employment situation deteriorated and the economy declined; simultaneously, the job opportunities lessened and the real income of broad social strata decreased due to inflation. Although economic activity slightly improved in the periods of 1996–2001 and 2001–2005, the world economic and financial crisis that started in 2008 broke the upward trend. The comparable data of the 2001 census, the 2005 microcensus and the 2011 census cannot detect the labour market movements between 2008 and 2011. Therefore, the study only refers to the fact that the slightly positive shift in economic activity between 2005 and 2011 was not continuous.

The impact of the crisis on the labour market was most intense in 2009, but while the decrease in employment had stopped by the end of 2010 and a slight growth could be observed in 2011, the indicators of unemployment kept deteriorating, and the signs of recovery appeared later. The 2013 labour market trends were favourable: employment increased, and unemployment as well as inactivity declined.

The active labour market policy had an important role in managing the crisis and tempering its impacts. The most direct intervention was the extension of public employment, which was also indicated by the 2011 census data. The number of public workers has gradually increased since 2008 and was more than 200 thousand in 2013.

2. Structural characteristics of employment

At the beginning of the last century, 61.1% of the total (2.8 million) employed population worked in agriculture and forestry. In 1949, within the number of employed people (that increased to 4.1 million in the meantime), still the majority (53.8%) worked in this branch.

Industry and construction had a relatively small role (15-16%) in employment until the 1920s, and accounted for only a fifth of employed people even in 1930. In the next decade, partly because of the war boom in the late 1930s, a nearly two percentage point increase was observed followed by stagnation in the first years after the Second World War.

Between 1920 and 1960, the proportion of people employed in the service-type industries was unchanged (25%).

The extensive industrialisation started in the 1950s and continued in the 1960s, causing structural shifts of an unprecedented extent. The proportion of people working in industry and construction doubled to 43.8% between 1949 and 1970. This growth occurred largely at the expense of agriculture, which was hit meanwhile by the collectivisation. As a result, less than a quarter of employees worked (as a main activity) in agriculture and forestry in 1970.

The proportion of earners in service-type industries fell somewhat after the Second World War and even in 1960 was only slightly higher than the level before the war. Between 1960 and 1970, it increased by four percentage points to 31.6%. In the 1970s, employment increased mainly in these industries, while, besides agriculture and forestry, a slight decline appeared also in industry.

In the period between 1980 and 2001, radical changes occurred in the composition of employed people by industries. The number of people working in agriculture as a main activity decreased by more than a quarter from 1980 to 1990; those employed in industry and construction fell by nearly a fifth (373 thousand people) while employees working in service-type industries (trade, accommodation and catering services, transportation) grew by more than 90 thousand (nearly 5%).

Since the 1990s, changes in the composition by industries have rapidly accelerated, reflecting strong modernisation processes. However, as already mentioned, one cannot ignore that the structural changes occurred in parallel with a very significant fall in the number of employed people. Because of the rapid privatisation, layoffs and the cessation of ineffective corporations, the number of the employed decreased by one million in the 1990s. After the middle of the decade, the decline changed to stagnation and then to a slight increase. Nevertheless, the number of employed people (3.94 million) was 13% less in 2011 than nearly a quarter of a century earlier. There were significant redundancies in the inefficient state companies. The “hidden”

unemployment – that had been present in a latent form in industry and construction earlier – became transparent. In agriculture and forestry, the cessation of secondary activities must also be taken into account when assessing the enormous reduction in the number of employed people.

Table 5

Composition of employment by branches of the national economy, 1900–1930 and 1949–2011
(percentage)

Branch of the national economy	1900	1910	1920	1930	1949	1960	1970	1980	1990	2001	2011
Agriculture, forestry	61.1	55.2	59.7	54.3	53.8	38.4	24.7	18.9	15.5	5.5	4.5
Industry, construction			15.8	20.2	21.6	34.0	43.8	41.9	37.9	33.1	28.3
Other (service) industries	38.9	44.8	24.5	25.5	24.6	27.6	31.6	39.1	46.7	61.4	67.2
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>

In the first decades of the 20th century, the widest stratum consisted of agricultural manual workers. Then, in parallel with the expansion of industry and construction, both the number and proportion of industrial workers started to grow.

In the first decades of the last century, only a negligible part of employed people (3.9% in 1900 and 6.2% in 1920) carried out intellectual work. Although demands for such work slowly increased, just about a tenth of the employees could be classified as non-manual workers in the middle of the century. Their number and proportion gradually grew over recent decades with 30.6% of employed people performing intellectual work in 1980, 33.2% in 1990 and 44.8% in 2011. Not only is the higher general level of education in the background of this trend but also that unemployment affected primarily the manual workers in the 1990s. This implies a positive shift in the economic structure of the country, e.g. the labour market shifted towards economic activities demanding more a qualified labour force.

To sum up, together with the sectorial structure, the composition of the national economy has undergone a profound shift in the last century.

During the last century, the composition of active earners changed fundamentally. Transformation was influenced by historical events: the two world wars, the Treaty of Trianon, the economic crisis, the centrally planned economy lasting for four decades after the Second World War, the loosening of this system and then, finally, the transition. However, this did not change the fact that, although with some contradictions and temporary breaks, modernisation has progressed. Hungary is no longer an “agricultural country”; the tertiary sector has become the main in-

come source of workers. The significance of intellectual work has multiplied, and physical work has also undergone a restructuring: heavy physical activities in agriculture and some branches of heavy industry (metallurgy, mining) have declined in importance, while service occupations have come to the fore. The traditional individual businesses that were neglected during the four decades of the socialist economy after the transition played again an important role in several branches of the national economy.

Table 6

Manual and non-manual employees, 1900–1930 and 1949–2011
(percentage)

Year	Manual employee	Non-manual employee	Total
1900	96.1	3.9	100.0
1910	95.0	5.0	100.0
1920	93.8	6.2	100.0
1930	93.2	6.8	100.0
1949	90.5	9.5	100.0
1960	82.8	17.2	100.0
1970	75.5	24.5	100.0
1980*	69.4	30.6	100.0
1990*	66.8	33.2	100.0
2001**	58.5	41.5	100.0
2011**	55.2	44.8	100.0

*According to HSCO-93.

** According to HSCO-08.

Note. Before 1980, the self-employed and their helping family members are included in the number of those performing manual activities.

The changes in the status of employed people due to the modernisation process have also influenced that of their dependants. Similarly, modernisation affected the career prospects of persons reaching retirement age. In consequence, the wide range of changes in the composition of employed people entails the restructuring of the whole society in the long run.

2.1. Composition of employed people by main occupational group

The basis of the analysis is the Hungarian Standard Classification of Occupations (HSCO-08) in force, the groupings of which were revised for 2001 census data. When

evaluating the processes of long periods, the occupational data categorised according to HSCO-93 or even older classifications of occupations is also referred to.

The occupational composition has been under transformation for a long time. Overall, the percentage of employed people performing intellectual work was 30.6% in 1980, 33.2% in 1990, 41.5% in 2001 and 44.8% in 2011; the proportion of managers, intellectuals and other non-manual workers within this category is gradually increasing.

In addition to the general improvement in educational attainment, the number of employed people declined – primarily because of unemployment – which affected manual occupations. It indicates that the economy keeps shifting towards branches and activities requiring labour that is more skilled. The significant rise in the proportion of people employed in service-type industries and the reduced employment in agriculture and forestry, as well as industry and construction, are reflected in employment data by main occupational group. Between 1980 and 2001, in particular, the figure of those workers dropped, who had elementary occupations not requiring any qualification.

Among the non-manual occupational groups, mainly the combined ratio of managers and professionals (highly qualified experts) expanded between 1990 and 2001, reaching 20.6% within the employed population in 2001. However, their proportion did not alter notably after 2001.

When the changes in these two categories are studied separately, one can find a smaller figure (5.1) of managers in 2011. This is owing to the difficulty of distinguishing between managing and supervising activities (and thus, some of the persons performing the latter are classified in other groups of non-manual and manual occupations).

The percentage of professionals steadily increased after 1990, reaching 15.9% in 2011. Despite the temporary decrease in importance, technical, intellectual occupations have long had a decisive role. Teachers working on different levels and in various fields of education also make up one of the most populous groups of intellectuals.

The proportion of manual workers employed in service-type occupations did not reach even 8% at the beginning of the 1980s, and then grew slightly until 1990 and was 16.1% in 2011. Due to the development in the field, the importance of this occupational group kept increasing since people performing the activities of trade, accommodation and catering services, transport, post and communication, as well as those connected to non-material services, can be classified here.

The percentage employed in physical occupations of agriculture and forestry was very low even in the 1980s and then declined gradually to 4% in 1990. The downward trend continued over the next two decades; the figures were 3.2% and 2.8% in 2001 and 2011, respectively. (These percentages can be slightly increased if simple agricultural workers classified among elementary occupations are taken into account.) However, information on these employees covers only main activity.

In the standard classification of occupations, industrial and construction industry workers, machine operators, assemblers and drivers form a separate group. Among employed people, the total proportion of these skilled and semi-skilled workers was 30.1% in 2001 and 26.1% in 2011. The transformation of the labour market is well characterised by the 15 percentage point decrease in the share of this stratum between 1980 and 2011.

Occupations requiring no qualification include different activities (cleaning, guarding of plants and buildings, material handling, etc.). Yet, persons performing such tasks form essentially a uniform stratum of low prestige. The share of these people that was significant (14.9% of employed people) a quarter of a century ago was 9.7% in 2011. The growing number of public workers and the change in the “content” of elementary occupations might have caused a slight increase in the percentages between 2001 and 2011.³

Table 7

Employed people by main occupational group, 1980–2011
(percentage)

Main occupational group (based on HSCO-08)	1980*	1990*	2001	2011
Managers	6.8	7.6	7.6	5.1
Professionals	7.7	8.6	13.0	15.9
Technicians and associate professionals	9.3	10.8	14.5	17.2
Office and management (customer services) occupations	6.8	6.1	6.4	6.6
Commercial and services occupations	7.7	8.6	15.0	16.1
Agricultural and forestry occupations	5.4	4.0	3.2	2.8
Industry and construction industry occupations	28.1	27.1	18.1	14.0
Machine operators, assembly workers, drivers of vehicles	13.3	13.0	12.0	12.1
(Elementary) occupations not requiring qualifications	14.9	11.5	8.4	9.7
Armed forces occupations	..	2.5	1.9	0.5
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>

* Excluding working pensioners and working childcare provision recipients, in compliance with HSCO-93.
Note. The data are based on HSCO-93 in 2001 and 2011.

The demographic composition of people according to gender in the various occupational groups demonstrates different features of these categories.

³ At present, some expertise is needed to perform simple activities such as operating cleaning machines, occasionally using a computer in doorkeeper jobs, etc.

The proportion of women among managers increased from a quarter in 1980 to a third in 1990 but then remained unchanged.

The majority of university and college graduates were women in the 1980s, and their share was nearly 57% among people having intellectual occupations in 2011.

The main occupational group, technicians and associate professionals, includes occupations that can be also pursued without a diploma and require substantive expertise but less responsibility and independent decision. The proportion of women is high in this group amounting to some two-thirds in 2011.

Earlier, almost exclusively, women made up the main occupational group embracing office and management occupations. However, now we see a clear change: their percentage fell from 86.1% in 2001 to 76.3% in 2011. The figures prove that men are also willing to perform the jobs (customer contact professions) of this group.

It can be concluded that a decisive change in the distribution of non-manual workers by gender took place in the 1980s, although later no significant structural shift was identified.

Service professionals have become an increasingly important group and their composition by gender has changed somewhat. The traditionally high proportion of women characteristic in this field has slightly decreased since 1980, whereby only around two-thirds of people performing service activities are women today. This change may be due to two facts: 1. a part of the male workforce was forced out of the traditional fields of industry and construction, so they replaced their previous occupations by service activities and 2. the importance of those occupations (e.g. property guard) requiring a mainly male workforce has increased, which were not typical in the earlier decades.

As far as the agricultural and forestry occupations are concerned, the general decrease in the headcounts was accompanied by a stable proportion of women (less than a quarter). The changes in agriculture (the decline in large-scale production and the increasing role of private holdings) primarily require the presence of a male workforce.

In industrial and construction work directly related to material production, men always undertook a crucial part. Their role has even strengthened recently: their proportion grew from 83.5% in 2001 to 89.0% in 2011.

The main occupational group, machine operators, assembly workers, drivers of vehicles, is also made up of jobs occupied primarily by male labour, their proportion has stabilized at around 70.0% in 2011. However, this group is witnessing large differences: one can hardly find any women among drivers, but the proportion of female assembly workers is around 66%.

The percentage of women among people having elementary occupations is traditionally around 51-52% just like today.

2.2. Characteristics of employed people by status in employment

In the period of the planned economy, the overwhelming majority of employed people belonged to the category of state employees, and due to the collectivisation of agriculture, most of the peasantry became members of co-operatives. Although collective membership was different from an employment relationship in legal terms, it made only a little difference in practice.

However, there were significant socio-economic and cultural differences, for example, between persons working in public administration, large-scale industry or agriculture. The number of public and local employees increased owing to the decisive re-stratification processes of Hungarian society a few decades before the transition. This refers to the flow of the agricultural population to industry, the increasing urban population and the rapid increase in the level of education.

Despite the reform package known as “economic mechanism”, the proportion of the self-employed among people in employment was less than 4% in 1980. Due to various legal requirements, the small number of independent artisans and traders could work only with a minimum number of employees, whereby this group of “private employees” was not recorded in many cases by contemporary statistics. The self-employed carried out their economic activity usually alone or with the assistance of helping family members or occasional ancillary workers at most. Besides artisans and retailers, this was also true for the small number of self-employed people in agriculture.

The so-called second economy had a significant role in Hungary, where public employees and co-operative members performed income-supplementing activities (particularly small-scale agricultural production), which involved some endeavour to become independent. By means of government measures, various forms of business (small co-operatives, economic work teams within state enterprises) emerged, especially in the 1980s, preparing the explosive expansion of the private sector in the 1990s.

Because of the gradual changes started in the 1980s, the proportion of the self-employed, members of partnerships and their helping family members, which was hardly 4% in 1980, exceeded 5% in 1990, and later (by 2001) almost tripled. While the importance of the co-operative sector was still notable in 1980, it shrank to a small fraction of this within three decades. It now plays only a negligible role.

Nowadays, employees account for the vast majority (84%) of employed people as a characteristic for a developed market economy. This proportion has remained stable over the past two decades. Meanwhile, their position has significantly changed. In contrast to the 1980s, when employees worked for state employers, today it is mainly the private sector that determines the framework of their activities. Joint stock companies and other forms of large (multinational) organizations employ a

large mass of people. Among persons working at small companies, due to the nature of these organisations, the proportion of the self-employed, helping family members and members of partnerships is high. As a consequence of the large number of small and medium corporations, their role is also significant in employment.

Since the 1996 microcensus, census-type surveys have been applying detailed categories for employment status. Sole proprietors are distinguished according to whether they work with or without employees; working members of co-operatives and partnerships are separately recorded. In 2001, 8.1% of employed people were sole proprietors not having any employee. This proportion has fallen to 5.8% by 2011. (There were a few people having liberal professions, they were classified among sole proprietors without employees, while helping family members were classified among employees of sole proprietors.)

Between 2001 and 2011, the number and proportion of sole proprietors declined, and those of the working members of partnerships stagnated. The reasons for the changes are diverse, e.g. a decrease in the number of so-called forced entrepreneurs due to the stricter legal rules of establishing businesses, the persistence of the rates of taxes at a high level and the spread of unemployment.

Table 8

Employed people by status in employment
(percentage)

Main group	1990	2001	2011
Employee	86.2	83.5	84.2
Sole proprietor, self-employed	4.7	10.3	7.8
without employee	..	8.1	5.8
with employee	..	2.2	2.0
Working member of a partnership	..	4.3	4.5
Working member of a co-operative	8.6	0.8	0.2
Casual employee	..	0.7	1.2
Employed in public work	..	0.0	1.8
Helping family member	0.6	0.3	0.3
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>

Note that only those sole proprietors are included in the table that carry out their activities as their main occupation. The percentage of sole proprietors is much higher among men than among women.

The number and proportion of the members of co-operatives have dropped significantly since 1990. In the beginning, this did not mean a decline in the co-operative

sector itself. Only the composition of people by status in employment has changed, since the large number of persons who worked in the ancillary workshops of co-operatives in the 1980s did not increase the number of members but that of persons in employment relationship with the co-operatives. From the late 1980s, parts of these workshops were closed, and other parts, seceded from the co-operatives, continued their activities in a different form of business.

The division of co-operative property due to compensation and the transformation of co-operatives also reduced the land and other assets used by them. The co-operatives – that transformed into private-property-based, voluntary associations and operated on a smaller land area with fewer possessions – provided subsistence for fewer people than earlier, and this affects not only the group of employees but also the members of co-operatives. Accompanying these trends (e.g. ageing of the population), the processes outlined also contributed to the decrease in the number of co-operative members and to the fall in their proportion among employed people from 9% in 1990 to 0.2% in 2011.

3. Unemployment

Since the early 90s, statistics on unemployment are collected regularly. They reveal several characteristics of unemployed people. For earlier periods, data on unemployment derive mainly from indirect sources.

3.1. On the history of unemployment

Unemployment appeared in Hungary in the early stages of capitalist industrialisation, in the last decades of the 19th century. Its extent fluctuated depending on various factors, primarily on economic cycles. At the beginning of the last century, it affected 3% to 5% of industrial workers (some 70–100 thousand people). Due to the international tensions in the years before 1914, substantial development of the military industry, and heavy industry in general, occurred, which had a positive impact on employment.

Unemployment disappeared during the First World War, but later it was a serious problem in the severe economic situation of the country, which had lost two-thirds of its territory. The period of consolidation in the 1920s resulted in a temporary improvement. Then, owing to the “Great Depression”, the number of unemployed people started to grow dramatically, and at the height of the crisis, that of jobless indus-

trial workers was estimated at about 250 000. This was accompanied by large-scale agricultural unemployment, which was increased by those village-born unemployed industrial workers who returned to agriculture.

The new war boom moderated unemployment in the second half of the 1930s and then practically eliminated it in the early 1940s.

One faces difficulties when actual unemployment of the post-war years is examined. The single-party state declared the “full employment”, and then regarded it as an axiom. It followed from this standpoint that, irrespective of the actual situation, unemployment could not be subject to statistical observations.

However, some sources of information were available in the decades after 1949 from which the trends of unemployment could be indirectly concluded. These data sources are the censuses (microcensuses), other population surveys and labour force balances.

The 1949 census provides some clues, although the mechanical comparison of its results with the 1990 and subsequent censuses would be erroneous, since the 1949 census was conducted under entirely different historical conditions, and the definitions based on international recommendations did not exist at that time. However, it is worth mentioning that, despite all these, the number of the unemployed and the unemployment rate recorded in 1949 did not fundamentally differ in terms of magnitude from those in 1990. The composition of the unemployed also shows similar features, but with some observable shifts.

In 1949, around 126 thousand people were classified as unemployed, which corresponds to an unemployment rate of about 3%.

The number of unemployed people in 1949 may have decreased in the years of extensive industrialisation. However, it is likely that unemployment did not completely disappear during that period and was present later as well. For example, due to the disproportionate industrial development of the regions, there was a shortage of labour in several areas, while a considerable labour reserve might have remained in others. During the waves of forced collectivisation, unemployment could also be created by the large numbers of people leaving agriculture. In the mid-1960s, the increasing dysfunctions of the centrally planned economy led to initiating a new economic reform. Advocates of the radical version of the reform deemed it possible that an actual labour market would develop and market principles would prevail, and they reckoned with open unemployment as well. However, the reform implemented in 1968 did not essentially amend the economic system. Emphasising the dogmatic approach that considered even the modest measures implemented too excessive, “full employment” was again declared an unassailable basic principle. Thus, the issue of unemployment could not be practically negotiated for a further two decades, irrespective of the fact that the territorial and structural disparities leading to unemployment continued to have an impact.

The phenomenon called “hidden unemployment” in the planned economy should also be mentioned here. The bottom line is that a large number of mostly uneducated and unskilled people worked in industry and some other branches of the national economy, which could not be given work or could be employed only with a very low efficiency. Thus, there was an unproductive “quasi unemployed” group of people whose earnings were low even in relative terms and only slightly exceeded the level which could have been paid as unemployment benefit at that time. The approximate size of this group is not known, it is likely, however, that it may have significantly changed depending on socio-economic and demographic conditions.

Regarding the 15 years after 1970, some conservative conclusions can be drawn about actual unemployment based on indirect information. The 1970 and 1980 censuses collected data only on the number of first-time jobseekers. When processing 1970 census data, however, this category was classified among dependants. In 1980, nearly 10 000 first-time jobseekers (mostly school leavers) were recorded, which indicated that the employment of young people leaving school was not always guaranteed.

The small sample labour force surveys conducted in the framework of the uniform population survey system (UPSS) gave an interesting picture about the situation in the second half of the 1970s and at the beginning of the 1980s.

The results of the 1976 UPSS survey highlighted, for example, that 18% of the nearly 470 thousand dependent, not studying women of working age would have been ready to work. This means that the number of those within the female population who were not working but were ready for employment under proper conditions was some 80-90 thousand. At least one-third of them fully met the criterion system of unemployment. The 1983 UPSS survey showed similar results.

At the time of the transition, one of the typical consequences of the socio-economic transformation was the appearance of open unemployment. From that time, censuses attached great importance to the publication of information on the subject. Although the programme of the 1990 census included the topic, the recommendation of the International Labour Organization (ILO) regarding interpretation, was not yet fully applied. For the concept “job search”, the census ignored the conditions of “availability”, therefore, the range of people qualified as unemployed could be somewhat wider if the ILO definition had been applied. (According to the definition of ILO, those persons can be considered unemployed who did not work during the reference week, did not even complete one working hour, had no job at all, were actively seeking work in the four weeks before the reference week and could have started working within two weeks if a proper job had been found.)

One of the main sources of information on unemployed people has been the labour force survey of HCSO since 1992, which is based on a representative household sample. The figures coming from census-type and labour force surveys are more or less different, but their basic trends are generally the same.

3.2. Demographic and occupational features of unemployed people

In the 1990 census, 126 thousand unemployed people were recorded, which corresponds to an unemployment rate of 2.7%. The number of the unemployed had grown to 484 thousand (12% unemployment rate) by 1996.

Table 9

Unemployment rate, 1996–2011
(percentage)

Combined age group, sex	1996	2001	2005	2011
15–29	17.4	14.4	16.3	18.6
30–49	10.5	9.1	9.8	11.6
50–59	6.3	6.6	7.6	11.3
60–	–	4.5	4.0	5.4
Total	12.0	10.1	10.8	12.6
Of which				
15–59 year-old men	13.7	11.5	11.4	13.0
15–54 year-old women	10.2	8.9	10.9	13.2

Unemployment became a general phenomenon and increased quickly in the beginning of the 1990s in line with the rapid economic and labour market changes. The privatisation of state property had a significant impact on the employment situation that was further aggravated by the collapse of the traditional Eastern market and the several-year-long Balkan crisis.

The country experienced high inflation for several years and impoverishment that strongly reduced the domestic demand. A significant amount of Hungarian products was not competitive on the world market.

After 1950, during the industrialisation, the large corporations or their establishments were placed in the underdeveloped regions of the country, and the large-scale agriculture also created a large number of jobs. The industry established in this period was characterised by the excessive rate of raw material and energy intensive industries compared with the facilities of the country.

In the years around the transition, layoffs, bankruptcy and liquidation proceedings concerned more or less the whole country and most branches of the national economy. In the first period, the dismissal of unskilled people who were involved in ancillary economic activities or had little experience and that of persons in or near retirement age were typical. The withdrawal of old people from the labour market was stimulated by the various forms of early retirement (e.g. early or pre-pension).

Meanwhile, new jobs were created due to foreign direct investments, although their number and regional distribution were not aligned with the supply side of the labour market.

Compared with 1996 data, the 2001 census showed a decrease: 416 thousand unemployed people were recorded (the unemployment rate was 10.1%).⁴ The figure was even higher, 467 thousand (with an unemployment rate of 10.8%) in 2005. Between 2005 and 2011, especially due to the economic and financial crisis of 2008, the number of unemployed grew considerably (to 568 thousand), which corresponds an unemployment rate of 12.6%.

In the beginning, unemployment affected men more than women. According to the 1990 census, the proportion of women among the unemployed was 32.8% and reached 46.5% in 2011. The unemployment rates also show that men were overrepresented among unemployed people. In 1996, for example, the unemployment rate of men aged 15 to 59 years was 13.7 percent, while that of women aged 15 to 54 years was only 10.1%. However, an “equalisation process” took place between the two genders, and, in 2011, the unemployment rates were nearly the same (13%) in the mentioned age groups. According to data, unemployment affected not only typical male occupations (e.g. in metallurgy and mining) but also jobs that mostly women had (in the public sector, health care, textile industry, etc.).

During the whole period the unemployment rate was the highest among young people. In the case of people aged 15 to 24 years, it even showed an increasing trend growing from 19.9% in 1996 to 23.2% in 2011. The figure is more favourable (it barely changed during 15 years) if the 25–29 year-old people are merged with the former age group. Despite this, the rate of 18.6% in 2001 was much higher than that of older age groups.

The unemployment rate of the 50–59 year-old group doubled between 2001 and 2011, reaching the level of the middle-aged generation. As previously mentioned, the pension system changes contributed to this situation; raising the retirement age, introducing stricter rules on early retirement and disability pensions made it more difficult to follow the strategy of the 1990s (e.g. employed people could choose some form of retirement instead of becoming unemployed). The same was true, although to a lesser extent, for employed people over 60 years of age.

The 1996 census revealed that the educational level has a very strong impact on the unemployment rate. Among those who completed eight or less grades of primary school, more than a fifth of the economically active population were unemployed. Their unemployment rate was nearly twice as much as the average (12.2%) and 10 times as much as the unemployment rate of people with a university or college de-

⁴ Due to the different methodology of the 1990 census regarding the subject, the changes in unemployment rates are only analysed from 1996.

gree (2.1%). The unemployment rate of people with secondary educational level was roughly “in the middle” between these two extremes. The unemployment rate of people who acquired a certificate of apprentice or vocational education without a secondary school-leaving certificate was above average (14.1%), while of people with a secondary school-leaving certificate was below that (8.2%).

It was a warning sign in 2001 that the improvement in the average unemployment rate did not apply to those obtaining a university or college diploma. However, considering the increasing labour supply of university or college graduates at the end of the 1990s, it is also considered favourable that the rate did not substantially change. Besides this, it can be assumed that from the years before the turn of the millennium, more and more people with a university or college degree had no other choice but to have jobs that could also be filled with a lower level of education.

Between 2001 and 2011, the unemployment rate of people completing only eight or less grades in primary school increased considerably (by eight percentage points to 27.2%), whereby the strong differentiation of unemployment by educational attainment persisted. The unemployment rate of people with a certificate of secondary vocational education grew to a smaller extent (from 11.5% to 14.2%), which implies that secondary vocational education may become more valuable. Despite the increase (from 6.7% to 10.3%) in their unemployment rate, those with a secondary school-leaving certificate are still more protected against unemployment than the average.

In the case of university or college graduates, the figure increased from 2.2% to 5.4% between 2001 and 2011, which shows the disadvantageous effects of the expansion of tertiary education. At the same time, it is likely that the qualification certified by a diploma is becoming “less useful” when searching for a job. This is confirmed by the 2011 census results: the unemployment rate of university or college graduates more than doubled in the last decade. However, this rate is much better than that of people completed lower levels of education. Unemployment is the highest among persons who completed only eight or less grades in primary school.

Information about the age, education and living conditions of the jobless clearly indicates that the unemployment rate is affected by various factors, such as the former occupation of the unemployed. Thus, it is worth comparing the actual occupational composition of the employed with that of jobless people prior to unemployment. The 2001 and 2011 census results are suitable for this purpose since they provide information not only on employed people but also on the last occupations of the unemployed by HSCO-08. It should be noted that the former reflects the actual status of employed persons at the time of the census, while the latter shows an earlier status. (For the long-term unemployed, it could mean a difference of even several years.) Moreover, a smaller proportion of jobless people are school leavers who were not active earners earlier.

Table 10

Unemployment rate by educational attainment, 1996–2011
(percentage)

Highest completed level of education	1996	2001	2005	2011
8 or less grades in primary school	21.1	19.1	23.1	27.2
Secondary school				
without secondary school-leaving certificate	14.1	11.5	11.8	14.2
with secondary school-leaving certificate	8.2	6.7	7.9	10.3
University, college, etc.	2.1	2.2	3.0	5.4
Total	12.2	10.1	10.8	12.6

Table 11

Employed and unemployed people by main occupational group

Main occupational group (by HSCO-08)	Employed		Unemployed		Employed		Unemployed	
	2001	2011	2001	2011	2001	2011	2001	2011
	persons				distribution (%)			
Managers	281 788	202 098	6 653	8 465	7.6	5.1	1.6	1.5
Professionals	478 533	625 944	9 405	24 736	13.0	15.9	2.3	4.4
Technicians and associate professionals	533 654	677 608	26 166	50 373	14.5	17.2	6.3	8.9
Office and management (customer services) occupations	237 309	261 585	18 142	31 749	6.4	6.6	4.4	5.6
Commercial and service occupations	552 046	633 116	55 021	93 238	15.0	16.1	13.2	16.4
Agricultural and forestry occupations	116 872	111 409	17 533	15 701	3.2	2.8	4.2	2.8
Industry and construction industry occupations	666 340	550 119	88 327	87 499	18.1	14.0	21.2	15.4
Machine operators, assembly workers, drivers of vehicles	443 846	477 164	51 972	70 462	12.0	12.1	12.5	12.4
(Elementary) occupations not requiring qualifications	310 255	384 371	83 996	133 569	8.4	9.7	20.2	23.5
Armed forces occupations	69 626	19 309	1 055	687	1.9	0.5	0.3	0.1
Never worked	–	–	54 407	52 018	–	–	13.1	9.2
Unknown	–	–	3 533	–	–	–	0.8	–
<i>Total</i>	<i>3 690 269</i>	<i>3 942 723</i>	<i>416 210</i>	<i>568 497</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>

Note. For unemployed persons, the last occupation is considered.

It seems obvious that becoming unemployed is less likely among non-manual workers (especially managers and those having jobs requiring higher qualifications) than among manual workers. In 2011, more than 45% of the employed and only a fifth of jobless persons belonged to intellectuals. However, it is unlikely, for example, that manual workers performing service-type activities become unemployed since the developing service sector requires a high number of skilled people. The situation is not so favourable in agriculture, forestry, industry and construction. Owing to the processes that afflicted heavy industry, many people who had worked in the manufacture of iron and metal products became unemployed but it was also the same for construction workers due to the prolonged stagnation of investments. Persons having elementary occupations are undoubtedly in the most disadvantageous situation.

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