



Case Study Briefing

The Social Land Program in Hungary



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1. Overview

The Social Land program helps socially disadvantaged people to strengthen self-sufficiency and to decrease reliance from the social aid.

The land program supports unemployed participants to produce agricultural goods and acquire competencies in household agriculture. The supported activities are the following: the production of goods, the delivery to markets, the creation of retail processes, the strengthening of network cooperations, and the procurement of missing tools, objects and equipment.

2. Key policy implications

The main aims of the program include activating, developing entrepreneurial skills, and securing social independency.

- Bottom up organization, in comparison to the top down coordinated public employment programs here the activity is designed and carried out locally;
- Attitude towards the target group – enabling and motivating and not sanctions when activating the segments who currently rely on social support;
- Recreation of the traditional, but forgotten, household economies for the disadvantaged segments of the society;
- Entrepreneurial municipalities instead of provider municipalities;
- Flexibility, variety: according to the needs of the target group, the program's results can include self-sufficiency or goods production;
- Professional supporting methodology network;
- The tendering organizations are usually coming from settlements with less than 1000-2000 inhabitants, where the land programs, besides the public employment, is the only tool for the local employment activation.
- The most important innovations of the social land program – serving as a model for integration – include the decrease of socialization deficits and the formation of employment culture, however, the program indirectly contributes to the improvement of the target group's employability.

3. Context

The beneficiaries and their need

The reason of this form of government support is until today the deep poverty in disadvantaged regions. The main characteristics of the participating settlements are long-term and high-level unemployment and the high rate of unskilled work force. Long-term unemployment resulted in moral crises in the multi-generational families, and the rate of local petty thefts increased. Due to the domestic migration processes started in the mid-80s, young people with good qualifications left and were replaced by 'immigrants' with lower status. This resulted in tensions in the local society, which calls for organizing integration programs, developing the living standard and the ability for self-reliance of the families. The program has social and not economic targets. As it can be also seen in its infrastructural background (Ministry of Human Resource Development), the target group, and the low volume of used resources, this program was regarded as an active social policy program. In the same time, it is also one of the well known tools of activating the disadvantaged social groups – especially Roma people- and one of the main supporter of the local economy development. The subject of the program is the autonomous family economy, where *beneficiaries do not participate in the program as employees, but as independent small producers.*

Who is involved?

On national level, the program is organized by State Secretariat for Social Affairs and Social Integration of the Ministry of Human Resource Development. On a local level, the participating municipality decrees regulate the projects. Non-profit organizations, social organizations, municipality associations, micro-regional associations are all allowed to apply for the program. It is compulsory condition for the project applicant to cooperate with the local Roma government. The disadvantaged families can join the program through applying municipalities and non-profit institutions.

Scope and scale

In 2004, the social land program could not be integrated with the European support system, therefore national resources provide its financial base. The yearly budget is allocated by the yearly law on the national budget. The project duration is between 10-12 months and one municipality receives 1 million HUF on average and involves 25-30 families.

Policy theme

The Social Land Program is one of the few initiatives which combine low investment with numerous innovative elements and large impact. The first important feature is the voluntary nature of the program. In comparison to the majority of the activation programs, in this one, the municipalities and families have to apply for the opportunity. The motivation of the participants becomes more important in the program than the social control. This kind of program offers the opportunity for the participants to develop special skills, to achieve a good performance and self-confidence.

A further important feature is the bottom-up organization of the local project. In comparison to the top-down coordinated public employment programs, here the activity is designed and carried out locally, and with the participation of the Roma minority organizations. This attitude towards the target group (enabling and motivating without sanctioning, offering different services, consulting and coaching, when the participants need social or professional support) is not usual in Hungary.

From the economic aspect, it is worth to mention the recreation of the traditional, but forgotten household economies by the disadvantaged groups, and to offer new roles in the family and the local community: to work, to produce something useful and to have chance to give something for the others. Flexibility, variety is also important, according to the needs of the target groups, the program can result in anything from self-sufficiency to goods production. Developing entrepreneurial habit of municipalities and local production of resources are also important aims.

4. Sources of evidence

The empirical research was based on the following tools:

- Review of program documentation (Social Land Program calls, bids, and local decrees)
- 10 interviews with key informants and local decision makers.
- the 3 focus group interviews organized for stakeholders and mayors of the participating communities focusing on the aims of the program and the evaluation of the achievements.
- The leaders of the SZOFOSZ (National Professional Association for Representing the Interests of the Settlements Operating Social Land Programme) agreed to take part in the evaluation and the data collection. Therefore we had the opportunity to collect information in 8 communities. The project staff members and the students of the Department of Sociology and Social policy filled out questionnaires with 153 families and recorded 48 semi structured interviews with members of the families participating in the programme.

The main dimensions of the questionnaire and interview were:

- the socio-demographic structure of the family
- the motivation of the participation in the program,
- the selection, activity, process, and products in the program,
- suggestions and criticism regarding the aims and execution of the program,
- expectations and satisfaction in the Social Land Program
- the future of the program

5. Main findings

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Challenges and Achievements of the project:

Out of the 153 participants of the survey, 42 (15 men and 27 women) considered themselves to be of Roma ethnicity, which is 26.9 percent of all participants. Based on the approximation of mayors who participate in the program, in most communities, at least 50 percent of all land program participants consists of gypsy people. Most of the participants of the Social Land Program joined due to their intentions of achieving a better quality of life (68.7%) or because they wanted to improve their self-sufficiency (6.7%). They were certain about the fact that participation in the program will not supply their living needs, but they also knew that it could have an important role in contributing to their income. Their expectations regarding the improvement of their living standards have become real according to the survey; on a scale of 1 to 5, 61.4 percent of the participants marked the 'completely satisfied' option, while 23.5 percent marked the 'rather satisfied' option. 88.2 percent of them said that they would participate in the program once more. What is the key behind this satisfaction? The answer can be found in the interviews:

"Well this is definitely a great amount of help for me. What we have received, I will now sow. I have planted potatoes in half of my garden, so if it turns out to be successful, I can definitely store those till next spring." (Panyola, single woman with two children, in her 30s)

".. this is the 25 chickens, that would be slaughtered anyway... this is so much. If you think about it, that means 25 daily portions. Or if you have a look at the eggs. So if the yield is 5 eggs a day, that is a lot. So this really helps our survival." (Jászladány, woman in her 40s)

The participants of the social land program are individuals from households of small communities with low levels of education, unfavorable labor market statuses and mainly with passive resources of income. The participation and application are voluntary in the program. In the analyzed programs, the organizers mainly selected families raising 3 or more children during the selection process. The conditions for participation were also formed by the performed activities, as in the "Horticulture and smaller livestock farming sub-program" – that we have also analyzed – applicants were required to have an area of land that is appropriate for being cultivated, as well as a building that could be used for small livestock farming. We also have to highlight the positive effect of the shift in family roles on future generations. The establishment of a producing, creating role in multi-generation families is very likely to change the dependency models related to the passive benefit system.

6. Impact & Implications

The impact assessment of the social land program has been carried out on two levels. On the one hand, we analysed the **impact on the target group** (the individuals who participated in the social land program as beneficiaries), as well as its **impact on the organizers and the community**.

Impact on the target group:

The most important innovations of the social land program – serving as a model for integration – is the decrease of socialization deficits and the formation of employment culture, however, the program indirectly contributes to the improvement of the target group's employability. In the execution of the social land program, minority governments in most communities took a part in the communication, recruitment or the selection process. In many cases, the representatives are either beneficiaries themselves or they are responsible for middle-level management duties. Among the positive effects, we also have to mention that during their everyday activity, the target group had developed their key skills needed for the participation in the labour market – for instance: taking responsibility, time management, cooperation, etc. – and know-how that could be used in the agricultural sector with high efficiency.

Impact on the organizers and the community:

The advantageous effects of the social land program were not only measurable on the level of the individual, but also that of the local community. The change in the image of the municipality and the establishment of a proper ownership situation were not only successful with regard to the economy. The activity performed together also reinforced the integrity of local community and it provided an opportunity to integrate previously excluded groups – such as Roma's or newcomers – in the local society. The activity and result of the land program decreased the prejudices against excluded groups, modified the views of the council leaders and members regarding the target group and the feasibility of common activities. The shared efforts and the achieved results improved the municipalities' level of self-sufficiency. However, there were many obstacles regarding the possibility to establish a self-maintaining community model, even in the most successful municipalities. The most common ones out of these were as follows: the lack of production tools and capital, the limitations of local markets – both the goods and the labor market; unfavorable demographic circumstances, and the lack of qualification.

7. Further information

To access the full report, please go to:


[INSERT LINK TO FULL CASE STUDY](#)


For further information on InnoSI: Innovation in Social Investment: approaches to social investment from the scientific perspective, visit our website at <http://innosi.eu/>

To view the Community Reporting video with a personal experience of the case study please follow the link below

[https://communityreporter.net/search/explore?search_api_views_fulltext=social%20land&f\[0\]=field_icr_network%3A92060](https://communityreporter.net/search/explore?search_api_views_fulltext=social%20land&f[0]=field_icr_network%3A92060)

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