

1 Demographic characteristics of Hungarian Jews

Owing to the sampling methods used (see Appendix 1), the survey data on the demographic make-up of the Jewish population need to be analysed with care. Nonetheless, the authors of the survey are confident that the composition of the sample of 2,015 individuals aged eighteen and over adequately reflects the current demographic situation, as evidenced by the general age-profile.

Age distribution

Table 1 shows that the age distribution of the sample was uneven. In particular, there are two points where the age structure of the sample population differed from that of the general Hungarian population. The 56–65 age cohort among the Jewish population was smaller than its adjacent cohorts (46–55 and 66–75). This represents the ‘war-time generation’, born between 1934 and 1943, which was likely to have been less numerous from the outset, due both to the uncertainty immediately preceding the Second World War and to the

situation during the war.¹ This generation was also seriously affected by emigration in the wake of the 1956 Hungarian revolution, as people in their twenties constituted the largest number of emigrants.

In addition, the high proportion of Jewish older people, particularly those aged over 75—compared with the Hungarian population in general—is also significant. This is due not only to sampling limitations but also to a relatively high Jewish life expectancy compared with the rest of the population. This finding is reinforced by mortality statistics from Budapest for both males and females. It was estimated that the life expectancy of the capital’s Jewish male population in 1999 was 78, compared with 68 for Budapest males in general; the life expectancy of Jewish women was 82, compared with 77 for the whole of the capital’s female population. In addition, the low proportion in the 26–35 age cohort is a direct reflection of the diminished 56–65 cohort.

Table 1: Age distribution of the sample population compared with the general Hungarian population, by gender (%)

| Age group | Jewish sample (N=2,015) | Hungarian population (1999) | Male Jews (N=956) | Hungarian males (1999) | Female Jews (N=1,059) | Hungarian females (1999) |
|-------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| 18–25 | 13 | 17 | 14 | 18 | 12 | 15 |
| 26–35 | 9 | 17 | 10 | 19 | 8 | 16 |
| 36–45 | 12 | 18 | 13 | 19 | 11 | 17 |
| 46–55 | 19 | 18 | 18 | 18 | 19 | 17 |
| 56–65 | 13 | 13 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 14 |
| 66–75 | 18 | 11 | 18 | 9 | 17 | 13 |
| 76 and over | 17 | 6 | 16 | 4 | 19 | 8 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Source for data on the general Hungarian population (N = 7,953,114): *Demográfiai Évkönyv. Magyarország népesedése, 1999* (The Demographic Yearbook. The Population of Hungary, 1999) (Budapest: KSH 2000), 10–15

¹ Between 1931 and 1937 the number of Jewish births in Budapest was 1,687 annually, but in the period between 1939 and 1943 it was only 1,000; see Viktor Karády, *Túlélők és újrakezdők* (Survivors and New Beginnings) (Budapest: Múlt és Jövő 2003), 74.

Gender distribution

Among the survey sample, the ratio of males to females was 47:53, and this gender distribution corresponds to that of the Hungarian population in general. The greater proportion of females in the older age groups is also seen in the Hungarian population.

Marital status

Tables 2a and 2b show that the proportion of married people in the Jewish population was lower than that of the Hungarian population as a whole. There was also a higher proportion of divorced Jews compared with the general population. The

proportion of the population widowed was also higher among Jews, due in large part to the relatively high number of elderly Jewish women.

Analysis of marital status by gender indicates that the percentage of divorced women among the Jewish population was much higher than that of divorced men. It was also higher than that of divorced women in the total Hungarian population. However, the data suggest that the growing number of cohabiting Jews corresponds well with the overall trends seen in the younger and better-educated non-Jewish population, with cohabiting couples outnumbering married couples among those under thirty.

Table 2a: Jewish marital status, by gender and age group (%)

| Gender and age group | N | Single | Married | Cohabiting | Divorced | Widowed | Total |
|----------------------|-------|--------|---------|------------|----------|---------|-------|
| Male | 952 | 20 | 56 | 8 | 7 | 9 | 100 |
| Female | 1,052 | 17 | 37 | 6 | 17 | 23 | 100 |
| Full sample | 2,004 | 19 | 45 | 7 | 12 | 16 | 100 |
| 18–25 | 249 | 85 | 4 | 11 | – | – | 100 |
| 26–35 | 176 | 36 | 37 | 19 | 8 | – | 100 |
| 36–45 | 241 | 12 | 58 | 10 | 19 | 1 | 100 |
| 46–55 | 374 | 6 | 63 | 6 | 22 | 3 | 100 |
| 56–65 | 260 | 7 | 64 | 4 | 16 | 9 | 100 |
| 66–75 | 360 | 5 | 50 | 4 | 13 | 28 | 100 |
| 76+ | 344 | 2 | 35 | 2 | 6 | 55 | 100 |

Table 2b: Marital status of the Hungarian population, by gender and age group (%)

| Gender and age group | Single | Married | Divorced | Widowed | Total |
|----------------------|--------|---------|----------|---------|-------|
| Male | 29 | 59 | 8 | 4 | 100 |
| Female | 18 | 52 | 11 | 19 | 100 |
| Full sample | 23 | 55 | 10 | 12 | 100 |
| 18–25 | 83 | 16 | 1 | – | 100 |
| 26–35 | 30 | 60 | 9 | 1 | 100 |
| 36–45 | 11 | 71 | 16 | 2 | 100 |
| 46–55 | 6 | 71 | 16 | 7 | 100 |
| 56–65 | 4 | 68 | 11 | 17 | 100 |
| 66–75 | 3 | 54 | 7 | 36 | 100 |
| 76+ | 4 | 29 | 3 | 64 | 100 |

Source: *Demográfiai Évkönyv. Magyarország népesedése, 1999* (The Demographic Yearbook. The Population of Hungary, 1999) (Budapest: KSH 2000), 36

Children

In general, the data indicate that the average number of children per household among Jews was similar to that of the Hungarian population at large. The mean number of children per sample family was 1.20. Some 29 per cent of households had no children; most of these comprised members of the younger generation. Thirty per cent of respondents had one child, 31 per cent had two children and 7 per cent had three or more children.² The low number of children is most likely connected to the practice of marrying relatively late in life and to the high educational status of the sample population (discussed below), as well as to the

growth in popularity of cohabitation and the high divorce rate. These Jewish population trends are reflected in trends observed among the better-educated sectors of the general Hungarian population.

However, one observation in particular does seem to differentiate the Jewish population from the general population. The number of children of men aged over forty in the sample was much higher than that of women aged over forty. One possible explanation for this is that men remarry after divorce more frequently than women, and tend to have children from second (or later) marriages.

2 These figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number. The 2001 Census found that the proportion of families without children in the Hungarian population was 23 per cent; families with one child represented 34 per cent of the population, those with two children 34 per cent and those with three or more children just 8 per cent (*Census 2001* (Budapest: KSH 2001), 51).

