

PENSION REFORM AND INTERGENERATIONAL REDISTRIBUTION IN HUNGARY

Abstract:

We apply the technique of generational accounting so as to quantify the effects of the 1998 Hungarian pension reform on sustainability and intergenerational redistribution. We find that the initially severe long-term imbalance has been significantly reduced. The effects of particular measures of the reform package are shown separately. By completing the data matrix with retrospective figures, we also compare lifetime net contributions of cohorts. It reveals that the first fifty cohorts entering the PAYG scheme came out winners of intergenerational redistribution. We also find that currently living generations will foot the bill of the ill-designed system instead of leaving it to the future. The reform added to the burden of cohorts born between 1948 and 1962 in particular.

JEL: H230, H550, H220, O243

Róbert I. Gál

(TÁRKI Social Research Centre, Budapest); gal@tarki.hu

Géza Tarcali

(European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research, Vienna); tarcali@euro.centre.org

1. INTRODUCTION

The predecessor of the current Hungarian pension system, established in 1929 as a funded plan, collapsed during World War II. After the war it was redesigned as a pay-as-you-go financed unfunded scheme. Step-by-step it replaced alternative institutions, the family in particular, in providing income for old age. By the 1980s it reached a high level of maturation with near-universal coverage, generous replacement rates (over 60 percent) and low retirement age (55 for women, 60 for men).

This system succeeded in protecting the old from utmost poverty through the transformational crisis in the 1990s. While pensions lost some value relative to wages, and while the real value of pensions decreased substantially, other sources of income for the inactive declined much faster. Consequently, the relative income status of pensioners improved significantly during the 1990s (Spéder 2000). This made the pension system very attractive for older workers: the actual retirement age dropped due to early retirement and the loss of control over disability retirement. The rapid growth of coverage in a shrinking economy diminished the range of pensions creating further disincentives to work. The administration of pensions also proved successful. While most firms changed ownership in the process of mass privatization, and the number of companies exploded, the pension agencies managed to collect and redistribute a significant part of GDP even though with declining efficiency.

Indeed the system proved to be too successful in some sense. Being the only institutional system settled and at the reach of policymakers, it absorbed a disproportionate part of the labor market crisis of the early transition years. It offered an escape route to hundred thousands of workers from the labor market who cannot be redirected to the labor

market any longer. This undermined the long-term stability of the system and induced an extensive reform in 1998.

In Sections 2 and 3 we outline the reform package and its implementation. In Section 4 we show our results on the effects of the reform on the long-term sustainability of the system. Finally, in Section 5 we complete the analysis with retrospective data, which allows us to derive conclusions on the intergenerational redistribution in the pension system.

2. THE 1998 PENSION REFORM¹

A comprehensive reform package (Law on Eligibility and Contributions to Social Security and Private Pensions 1997/80 Law on Social Security Pensions 1997/81 and Law on Private Pension and Private Pension Funds 1997/82) was passed in 1997 and came into effect on January 1, 1998.²

By the law on eligibility and contributions, employers' pension contributions were to decrease from 24 percent of gross wages to 23 percent by 1999 and 22 percent by 2000. In contrast, employees' contributions were to increase from 6 percent to 7 percent by 1998, 8 percent by 1999 and 9 percent by 2000. The social security administration was instructed to establish a personal contribution register from 1999.

The private pension law established a new pre-funded and defined contribution type of second pillar managed by private companies. Fund membership was made optional for those who had already contributed to the old system but mandatory for new entrants to the labor

¹ Sections 2 and 3, description of the pension reform and its implementation, rely on Gál, Mogyorósy, Szende and Szivós (2003).

² An analysis of the 1998 reform see in Simonovits (1999), Müller (1999), Marin, Stefanits and Tarcali (2001), Rocha and Vittas (2002) and Augusztinovics et al. (2002).

market. The option was left open for 20 months. Voluntary switchers were allowed to return their full contributions to the social security. The funds were to get about 20 percent (6/31) of the contributions of those who switched, which should have grown to about 25 percent (8/31) in two years. So no full opting-out was allowed. The second pillar covers only longevity risk. Fund members who get disabled can return to the first pillar by returning their savings to the social security. By this, they can fully recover their eligibility in the first pillar. Alternatively, they can also leave their savings in the fund. In this case, however, social security pays only 75 percent of what would have been paid otherwise as disability pension.

Hungarian pension funds have a special property rights structure.³ They take the form of mutual savings associations, so members are not clients but co-owners of the fund. Funds are managed by the board of directors and supervised by the board of supervisors. Both bodies are elected by the general assembly of the members. Funds can be either open or closed but the same set of regulation applies to both types. The funds release quarterly and annual report, which are partly standardized by regulation. They are obliged to give annual information to the fund members on the state of the personal accounts. The funds are also controlled by external actors such as a custodian and the State Financial Supervisory Authority, which can release and withdraw fund licenses.

The social security pensions law enacted reforms in the first pillar. It changed several elements of the old-age entry pension formula. Degressiveness in the imputation of earnings to the pension base will be phased out gradually. The accrual rates in the pension scale will be made linear from 2013, with 1.65 percent of lifetime earnings for every service year for those who stayed in social security with full contributions and 1.22 percent for those who partially opted out. According to the transition rule, the reduction in the accrual rate from 1.65 percent to 1.22 percent was calibrated to the rate of partitioning of contributions ($1.22/1.65 \approx 1-$

³ See Rocha, Gutierrez and Heinz (1999).

(8/31)). However, benefit reduction has been extended to include service years earned prior to the reform, when all contributions were paid to social security. In this way, in addition to the obvious elimination of a sizable part of the implicit pension debt, the legislators wanted to assure that the actual age limit of switchers would be low.

Also from 2013, the pension base will be shifted from net to gross earnings while pensions will be made subject to income taxation. As for established pensions, the net wage indexation was to be replaced by the so-called Swiss indexation after a transition of two years (in 1999 100 percent of net wage index, in 2000 a 30-70 percent mix of consumer price index and net wage index, and finally from 2001 a 50-50 percent mix of the two indices). Rules of the survivors' benefits also changed. In addition to the own right pension, a widow has also been eligible for the widow benefit since 1998, which is 20 percent of the pension of the deceased spouse. The law also confirmed the raising of retirement age legislated but suspended before. According to the new rules, the retirement age for men was raised from 60 to 61 in 1998 and to 62 in 2000, whereas for women it was raised by one year every second year and will reach 62 in 2009.

3. IMPLEMENTATION

The 1998 pension reform was the result of a number of compromises.⁴ However, political dispute on the pension system has not ceased and the rules have kept changing even after the legislation, in particular as the incoming government, elected in 1998 just after the new funds were set up, voted against the reform a year before while it was still in opposition.

⁴ On the political economy of the pension reform see Müller (1999), Orenstein (2000) and Nelson (2001). On the comparison of East European and Latin American pension reforms see Müller (2002).

In 1999 the indexation differed from what was originally planned. Backward-looking indexation was replaced by forward-looking indexation, which was unfavorable for pensioners. In 2001 and 2002, however, pensions were raised faster than dictated by the indexation rule. Contributions were also reduced from 31 percent of gross wages in 1998 to 28 percent in 2001, 26 percent in 2002 and 26.5 percent in 2003.

As for the second pillar, contributions paid to the private funds were not raised to 8 percent of gross wages after two years but were frozen at 6 percent without adjusting the accrual rates in the transition rules. From January 2003 the distribution of contributions between the two pillars were re-regulated again due to another change in government. Currently 7 percent goes to the funds. The new government, elected in 2002, also promised to raise this level to 8 percent from 2004.

The official projection suggested about 1.3-1.5 million mandatory pension fund members, while the true figure was about 2 million, roughly 50 percent of the economically active population (including the unemployed), of whom 93 percent were voluntary members and 7 percent were mandated (new entrants into the labor market). The deadline of voluntary switching was August 1999, however from January 2003 those under the age of 30 can again opt out to the mixed system (for new entrants it is mandatory). Although voluntary members were allowed to return to the social security with their full contributions till December 2000, and this deadline was prolonged to December 2002, the number of those who returned remained marginal, under 90 thousand. New entrants are mandated to choose a fund, although for one year, in 2002, membership for the newcomers was made optional. In the same year, mandatory members were also allowed to return to social security. The return option is still open to those who were new labor market entrants in 2002 and joined a fund in that year but it will be closed by December 31, 2003.

36 mandatory funds started their operation in 1998 but this number has been reduced by mergers and acquisition to 21 by 2001. The market is rather concentrated which is typical in markets dominated by open funds. Funds with a backing of large banks or insurance companies had the best chance of survival (Augusztinovics et al. 2002)

4. EFFECTS ON SUSTAINABILITY OF THE SYSTEM

We examine the long-term effects of the pension reform using the framework of generational accounting. This technique⁵ is aimed at quantifying financial tensions invoked by the current situation of the redistribution system. The essence of the method is to break down net taxes by cohorts, and project these values, the current age-tax profile, into the future. Given a few additional assumptions on the growth of productivity and the discount rate, as well as population forecasts, the level of contribution levied on future generations by the present net tax profile projected into the future can be determined so as to meet the inter-temporal budget constraint. The latter is simply a zero-sum constraint stating that someone (descendants in the absence of others) must defray possible over-spending of the present. To put it more precisely: the present value of future net contributions of current and subsequent generations has to be equal to the present value of current government debt and future government expenditures.

⁵ See the first example of generational accounting in Auerbach, Gokhale and Kotlikoff (1991). A theoretical background and international comparative results can be found in the book of Auerbach, Kotlikoff and Leibfritz (1999). Regarding methodological questions refer to the web-site www.generationaccounting.com, for the study of Cardarelli, Kotlikoff and Sefton (1999) and Raffelhüschen (1999).

Generational accounting reduces the role of expert forecasts for future trends to a minimum, its aim being to quantify tensions present in the current situation. Thus, besides predictions on population and institutional changes set in the pension acts in advance, no other estimated trends will be considered. Changes expected in employment, the practice of granting disability pensions, the proportion of entrants to higher education, age-earnings profiles, or personal income taxation, will be omitted. For all these variables a predictive model needs to reserve clear and explicit assumptions – generational accounting, however, is not predictive.⁶

The output of our calculations on the Hungarian generational pension accounts is a vector of dollar amounts. The entries of the vector indicate the difference between the present value of contributions expected to be paid by a generation throughout the remainder of their lives, and the present value of the benefits they are granted. Following on from the method that neglects past contributions and benefits, such a calculation suggests that the elderly are net beneficiaries, while active cohorts are net contributors to the system.

Obviously, this outcome in itself is a sterile one. However, three approaches arise which may render the data fertile for analysis. The first is to perform not only forward-looking, but also retrospective calculations, that is to take account of former contributions and benefits as well. Given such data, intergenerational redistribution can be measured. We will present the results of such retrospective data in Section 5. The second procedure is that of international comparison. If the same method produces different distribution curves for different countries, this fact again informs us of intergenerational redistribution.

Finally, by comparing the newborn cohort with the as-yet unborn (who are treated as a unified age group), we obtain a measure of generational imbalance in the system. The method

⁶ Generational accounting, as indicated by the name, is accounting rather than economics. See Fehr and Kotlikoff (1999) for generational accounting in a general equilibrium context.

involves the assumption that changes in taxes and benefits apply only to future generations, whilst current generations are to pay taxes and reap benefits in accordance with current rules. Consequently, an imbalance value indicates how much more (or, in a fortunate scenario, less) future generations have to pay for the same benefits, or how much less benefit they have to settle for (or how much more benefit they may receive) while paying the same taxes as those who were born into the original age-profile of taxes and benefits, and have their whole career ahead of them.

The measure of imbalance reflects the long-term sustainability of the system of redistribution. In this sense it is a relative of the amount of implicit debt (Holzmann, Palacios and Zviniene 2001). On the other hand, the imbalance gives an indication of intergenerational redistribution only to a limited extent, partly because it is forward-looking with no retrospective data and partly because it neglects the alternative of current generations footing the bill of imbalance.

Generational accounting is supposed to extend over the entire government budget, including taxes on income, consumption and property, as well as pensions, family assistance, education, health care, and all other public programs. The work edited by Auerbach, Kotlikoff and Leibfritz (1999) contains such calculations for 17 countries. Many of these studies consider reforms in public finance or public services. It is less common to do generational accounting on specific institutional reforms.⁷ Such calculations are more complicated because reforms are frequently not immediate, but rather they describe an agenda for future action. For this reason it makes sense to carry out generational accounting separately for pension systems in countries such as Hungary, where pension legislation sets the intended steps of institutional reform in advance.

⁷ For exceptions see Auerbach, Gokhale and Kotlikoff (1991b) on Medicare, Boll, Raffelhüschen and Walliser (1994) on German social security or Bonin, Gil, and Patxot (2001) on Spanish pension reform.

Generational pension accounts without pension reform

Data on social security contributions were obtained from two samples taken from personal income tax declarations for the year 1998, provided by the Tax and Fiscal Inspection Office (tax office in short, the Hungarian equivalent of the Internal Revenue Service). The first one comprised a 0.5 percent random sample of employers' declarations of employees' income comprising 10,874 cases, the other was a 1 percent random sample of self-declarations with 21,305 cases. Since our benefit data derives from the year 2000, the tax data for 2000 as estimated from the tax office file was used by multiplying taxable incomes by the rate of gross wage increase. We considered employers' and employees' contributions paid either to the first or the second pillar as pension revenues. We did not include, however, in the calculation government transfers to the Pension Insurance Fund (PIF).

The benefits were estimated from a 1 percent sample of pensioners stratified by so-called main benefits (in the Hungarian system, a person may receive different benefits, e.g. old-age pension as well as survivor benefit simultaneously). The sample, consisting of a total of 31,487 individuals, was supplied by the Central Administration of the National Pension Insurance (CANPI).

Our calculations of the no-reform scenario suggest that the Hungarian public pension system was unsustainable in the long-term without the comprehensive reform package of 1998. For this run we take into account only a single reform measure, raising retirement from 55 to 58 for women and 60 to 62 for men. These are the reform steps that came into effect by 2000, the base year for our calculations. The resulting significant long-term imbalance is not

surprising given the gloomy prospect of demography and the deficit of the system amounting to \$396 million⁸ in the base year.

We present generational pension accounts in Figure 1. The bold curve in the figure begins with a sharp decline. The per capita account of future generations is \$13,600, while that of the zero year old is a mere \$1,200.⁹ This difference provides the most important index of generational accounting. If deficits in the system are devolved entirely on to the as-yet unborn, they will be burdened with making \$12,400 more lifetime contributions than those who are already in the system but have their whole careers ahead of them.¹⁰ This line suggests an extremely severe internal tension.

⁸ This amount differs from the 63 million deficit indicated in the balance sheet of the PIF, since we used a different list of revenues as well as expenditures. Since we consider social security a closed system, only contributions are taken as revenues, general taxes are not (except for those that cover contributions lost to the private funds). On the expenditures side we took into account certain services not financed by PIF but the government, although they are part of the pension system. For more details on the problems of defining the pension budget see Gál and Tarcali (2003). Since much of disability pensions, financed by the Health Care Fund (HIF), function in practice as old-age pension, in particular they open the exit door of the labour market for people with no serious health deterioration, and most of disability pensions are not covered by our data sets, we believe, this is still not the final word of setting the balance sheet of the pension system.

⁹ In an earlier discussion paper version of this study (Gál, Simonovits and Tarcali 2001) we used estimations for the pension budget of 2000 since the actual figures had not been published yet. The estimation of revenues proved to be too pessimistic in the light of the actual figures. On the expenditure side, operation costs grew higher than planned by PIF which added to the above effect. In addition, we used a slightly different list of expenses. The difference between estimation and reality influences the generational imbalance, which is a very sensitive measure anyway, but it makes no effect on any conclusions such as the impact of the pension reform and its particular elements on the long term sustainability of the system.

¹⁰ For the sake of comparison, the monthly net industrial wage was about \$200 in 2000.

>>> **Figure 1 here** <<<

Note that the unreformed system is inefficient even for the newborn. This rises further with age, as older children receive orphan benefits for an ever-shorter period. The greatest net contributors are the 24-year-olds. In practice they no longer receive orphan benefits, neither yet old age nor disability pensions. For them it would require the immediate payment of a lump sum of more than \$6,240 to equalize lifetime contributions and benefits. This does not mean of course, that the current 24-year-old will necessarily end up worse off than the newborn generation. The careers of these two generations could only be compared if the account for the 24-year-old was calculated from the moment they were born as well.

For the 39-year-old, the account turns negative, i.e. they may start to expect more benefits from the system than contributions they have yet to make. Contributions and disbursements fall into balance at such an early age because without reform the time remaining before retirement is only nineteen years for women and twenty-three for men, and disability pensions and other forms of early retirement reduce the active period even further.

Generational pension accounts favor the 59-year-old age bracket the most. They have reached the point of paying almost nothing into the system, whilst they stand to withdraw \$18,190 over their remaining period in the pension system. We should note that this observation is not appropriate to describe redistribution among current generations. It serves as a base for the evaluation of changes produced by the introduction of respective reform measures.

In the above calculation, we took a look at how large the generational imbalance would be if no reform had taken place (apart from minor modifications to the retirement age). Below, in the second run, not only are future demographic developments taken into account, but all aspects of institutional changes, Swiss indexation, the effects of further raising the

female retirement age from 58 to 62; the phasing-out of degressiveness in the benefit formula¹¹; the introduction of a new scale of accrual rates replacing the current one in 2013; the replacement of tax-free pension with taxable benefits and finally, partial pre-funding.

The impact of the pension reform on generational pension accounts

The second (regular) curve of Figure 1 demonstrates that pension reform considerably reduced the severe imbalance originally prevailing in the system.¹² The deficit of future generations fell from \$13,600 to \$650 (see the figures in Table 1). Most of the related costs are borne by the current active generations, although, to a lesser extent, primarily due to Swiss indexation, current pensioners also bear some of the costs. As mentioned before, this and all subsequent remarks about the effects of reform on intergenerational redistribution are subject to restrictions due to the assumption of generational accounting that all imbalances are covered

>>> **Table 1 here** <<<

by future generations. This does not contradict to the previous sentence. We compare two distinct computations and separately both are built on the assumption mentioned. A comparison of the resulting accounts gives some hints on intergenerational redistribution. Should the inter-temporal budget constraint of the model be supplemented with annual budget

¹¹ The pension formula is called degressive since it cuts from higher income brackets. So in the process of calculating the starting pensions the lowest bracket of the net income is taken in full, the second lowest in 90 percent and so on.

¹² Benczúr (1999) and Rocha and Vittas (2002) came to similar conclusions whilst applying different methods.

constraints, not only future generations, but all current generations would be made to defray the annual deficit on the basis of the current profile of net general taxes. By aggregating the annual supply of deficit (or redistribution of surplus) for all years, the redistributive effect of pension reform on any generation can be precisely determined.

Besides the main result that long-term financial tensions decreased, another important conclusion is that in spite of the significant changes (on the baseline assumptions) the system still falls short of a clear balance. Newborn and future generations are expected to remain net contributors to the system, i.e. their contributions will produce negative real returns.

The introduction of the new rules on indexation into an expanding economy substantially alleviated the imbalance in the system. The sole beneficiaries of the change are future generations. As far as they are concerned, their overpayment under the no-reform scenario of \$13,600 falls to \$7,200 which is itself still high. For all other generations Swiss indexation reduces the amount of prospective pensions. The balance of contributions and benefits for the newborn rises from \$1,200 to \$3,000. Since the difference between the accounts of the zero-year-old and future generations is cut from both sides, the generational imbalance reduces from \$12,400 to \$4,200. This still does not represent a balance; it simply serves to diminish the disadvantage that the as-yet unborn have compared to the newborn.

The new indexation rule also raises the age at which individual contributions fall into balance with benefits. The age of the first generation that will take more out of the system in the future than it will contribute rises from the previous figure of 39 to 42. The 59-year-olds remain the greatest net beneficiaries, although they would receive a lump sum of just \$16,890 in compensation for the loss of their annuities. Among pensioners, the effect of indexation diminishes with age, as it applies to shortening periods.

Completing the adjustment to the retirement age realigns generational imbalance from \$12,400 to \$5,800, a smaller alteration than that arose from Swiss indexation (though this

may not be true for the impact of the full adjustment of the retirement age).¹³ Future generations as well as the zero-year-olds are net contributors to the system. The as-yet unborn cohorts benefit from the higher retirement age, although practically no one else does. Net contributions of the zero-year-olds for instance, increase from \$1,200 to \$2,100 owing to the longer contributing period and shorter retirement, while for that of the greatest net contributors, i.e. those aged 24, rise from \$6,240 to \$7,210. As for the rest of their lives, the 43-year-olds are already net beneficiaries in the system. In contrast to Swiss indexation, the burden of raising the retirement age, being imposed as it is exclusively on the active generations, becomes more concentrated.

Legislators wanted the degressive nature of the benefit formula to be phased out gradually by raising annually the so-called degressive brackets by 8 percentage points above net income growth. By means of this discrepancy, the uppermost brackets will gradually "empty", and all income will eventually fall into the 100 percent bracket. In practice, we took the net contribution profile for the base year and raised the old-age pension of generations currently retiring each year at the above-mentioned rate.¹⁴

Phasing out degressiveness in the benefit formula, in contrast to the rest of the measures of the pension reform, does not diminish, but rather improves the position of all

¹³ Note that these results are not additive, as each effect is compared separately to the pre-reform situation.

¹⁴ At this point we need to refer to a methodological problem, in particular the difference between the projection of current conditions and the projection of current changes. Considering changes occurring in the given year as a result of new retirements would effectively raise the average old-age pension of the given generations only according to the relative weight of entry pensions. However, in 1999 approximately only one third of the cohort reaching retirement age actually retired – the rest had retired early, that is, under the official retirement age. In order to avoid having the calculations distorted by one extreme year, data on the mean of many years' of new retirements is required. Unfortunately, no such data was available, so instead of the changes, the initial conditions were projected into the future at this point.

living, still active generations. Current pensioners are left unaffected. For future generations, however, phasing out degressiveness further increases the imbalance even though this change is not a major one. A further \$1,200 is added to the original deficit of \$13,600. Similarly, the gains of the current generations have no decisive impact on the balances emerging in default of the reform, either. The differences per generation vary from \$160 to \$670.

Of all measures of the pension reform, it is the effect of the new pension scale which is to replace the current one in 2013 that is the most difficult to quantify. In this case we cannot use the year 2000 pension profile, we need to modify it in accordance with the new scale. The new scale entails two significant changes. First, *accrual rates* (depending on the number of years of service) are new. They are specified by the law. Secondly, from 2013 the *pension base* (which is to be multiplied by the accrual rate to obtain the starting pension) will be determined on the basis of *gross* estimated lifetime income, and the resulting benefit will be taxed as personal income. This is contrary to the rules in force at present and until 2012, by which firstly the net base of the pension is determined and then multiplied by the accrual rate to yield the net pension. The post-2013 accrual rates are lower than the current ones, i.e. where the net pension base is equal, a smaller pension will result. The fact though that the taxable part is initially reduced on the basis of these rates, and only subsequently is the rest taxed, results in a lower average personal income tax rate, which in turn pulls the post-2013 starting pensions closer the present ones.

In order to grasp the effect on generational accounting, we calculated how the ratio of the net starting pension compared to the final gross income changes. The first step was to calculate the ratio for the currently retiring generations, drawing on data from 1998 (the figures used in the calculation were *generational* averages, and not the averages of *those currently retiring*). The value of the replacement rate was 0.409; as a generational average, it cannot be compared directly with other replacement ratios.

The corresponding replacement ratio for the year 2013 can only be calculated in a number of steps. The *final* monthly gross wage is provided on the basis of monthly wages in the base year and the growth rate of productivity. For the *lifetime* monthly gross wage however, only a rough estimate can be given. We assumed that the ratio of the final monthly gross wage to the lifetime monthly gross wage remains the same as in the 1988-1998 period. This latter calculation was computed on the basis of Toldi (2000), using his Tables 3, 1.15, 1.16 and 1.17. The value in question came to 0,907, covering the period through 1998, where the monthly average of the gross indexed lifetime wage equaled approximately 90 percent of the final monthly gross wage. This was the value we used to obtain lifetime monthly gross wages from final monthly gross wages after 2013. This latter serves as the basis for determining pensions after 2013 with the new accrual rates.

The starting pensions generated in this way were reduced by the average personal income tax. In order to derive the latter, we calculated the retiring generations' average gross as well as net wages for the year 1998, from the available tax records.¹⁵ From these, the average tax rate came out at 30.1 percent.

This was how we came to have figures for net starting pensions as well as final gross wages for each generation, on the basis of the new pension scale. The rate of the two, the post-2013 counterpart of the replacement ratio used above, took a value of 0.366. So to sum up, the new scale reduced starting pensions by an average of 10.5 percent for calculations based on 1998 figures.

This ratio was incorporated into the model in such a way that old-age pensions were cut by 10.5 percent on the profile of the base year for those generations whose members will already receive their pensions according to the new scale (i.e. those aged 49 and below in

¹⁵ These wages are again *generational* averages, and do not necessarily equal the average final wage of *those imminently retiring*.

2000). For this calculation also, we followed the method employed for the quantification of degressiveness, i.e. we applied the same rate for the entire generation, for the reasons specified in detail above.

The above methodological description also implies that the procedure, by which we used fully indexed wages to produce the lifetime gross wage, in practice solved the problem that, given decreasing inflation, partial indexation also exerts a depressing influence on the dynamics of starting pensions.

The beneficiaries of these changes are future generations, in other words, the introduction of the new scale improves the long-term sustainability of the system. The volume of changes roughly equals the impacts of phasing-out degressiveness, only one is positive and the other is negative. These two reform measures more or less cancel one another out, as far as the long-term effect is concerned. The same does not apply however to the intergenerational redistribution. While all active generations benefit from phasing-out degressiveness, the costs of the new scale will be borne exclusively by younger generations, those presently at the age of 49 or under. Those retiring in the decade preceding 2013 are the main winners from this discrepancy.

Partial pre-funding of the pension system – i.e. establishing private pension funds – raises a theoretical rather than methodological problem in generational accounting. A deficit evolves in social security, while capital is accumulated in the private pension funds. Both bear interest; therefore realistic assumptions are required regarding these interest rates.

According to our approach, the pension system (being an endowment life insurance combined with annuities) comprises two stages, accumulation and benefit payment, independent of whether the system is pay-as-you-go or funded. In the funded scheme, the period of accumulation is simply the accumulation of contributions in the course of one's active life. In a pay-as-you-go scheme the "fund" is the taxpaying capacity of the new up-

coming generations that can be best approached by the covered wage bill as a proxy. Thus, accumulation is the process of bringing up and training new generations, enhancing the efficiency of their labor and collecting their payroll taxes. The optimal allocation of contributions should depend on the comparative efficiency of these two kinds of accumulation provided annuities from the two schemes do not differ.

The empirical background for making assumptions on comparative efficiency is limited. We have data on the covered wage bill in Hungary only from the 1990s. The covered wage bill declined from 30 percent of GDP in 1992 to 25 percent in 2000, a fall that was just compensated for by the 27 percent growth in GDP over the same period. In contrast, the BUX-index of the Budapest Stock Exchange closed in the year 2000 at 7850 points. The corresponding figure for 1992 was 796 (its CPI corrected value was 2999). These trends reflect significantly higher rates of return on private savings as compared to public investments in terms of taxpaying capacity, although the 1990s may give a distorted picture. Between 1950, the first year of the pay-as-you-go scheme and 1990, the covered wage bill may have grown much faster whereas the stock exchange did not exist in the centrally planned economy. So without venturing into short and potentially misleading Hungarian time series we came to a conservative conclusion, that a combination of pre-funding and private management of savings brings additional efficiency to the system assumed to be closed. As for real figures we based our assumptions on international experiences. We set the average annual returns of private pension funds at 4 percent (also covering additional administrative costs). This is a conservative assumption in the light of international comparison (see for instance, OECD 1998, 69).

The emergence of private pension funds affects the position of social security from two angles. First of all, contributions are lost to private funds in proportion to the number of individuals who switch to private contributions and the magnitude of membership fees.

Secondly, according to the rules of switching, disbursements will also drop with time for those who have switched over to the mixed system.¹⁶

In calculating accumulations to private pension funds we used a uniform retirement age (62 years). We assumed contributions to private pension funds to yield interest until the individual reaches the age of 62, then everyone collects the accumulated wealth uniformly in a lump sum.

The figures in Table 1 suggest that partial pre-funding, on the assumptions made, brings about a significant net improvement in the accounts of future generations. Where contribution rates of 6 percent of gross wages are paid to private pension funds, members of the as-yet unborn generations have to pay \$3,000 less as compared to the case of no reform. The position of those born in 2000 remains practically the same as in the baseline case. Note that we have not provided estimates for prospective pensions, but for changes taking place in the balance of the pension system in consequence of any of the reform measures. Given contributions of 6 percent of gross wages, the difference between the generational accounts of those born in 2000 and the future generations is \$9,400, i.e. imbalance is reduced by \$2,970 as compared to our baseline.¹⁷

¹⁶ As private pension funds only pay the private pensions of old-age pensioners, and as prescribed by the transitional regulations presently in force, the accumulations on individual accounts of disabled fund members are transferred to PIF, we followed the same procedure.

¹⁷ We made calculations with contributions of 8 percent of gross wages to pension funds (contribution level that would have been applicable according to the law). The additional efficiency brought into the system resulted in lower generational accounts for all cohorts affected. Newborn and future generations gained \$240 compared to the 6 percent scenario leaving generational imbalance unchanged at the level of \$9,400. The improvement in generational accounts for all other cohorts remains within the range of \$430, reaching its maximum for the 24 year old.

5. EFFECTS ON INTERGENERATIONAL REDISTRIBUTION

The measure of generational imbalance is based on a forward-looking calculation. If the process is completed with retrospective figures, i.e. former contributions and benefits are also taken into account; redistribution among generations can be measured directly comparing entire careers. If there are ‘looser’ and ‘winner’ cohorts, they can be sorted out.

We calculated retrospective contribution-data from 1950, the year the pay-as-you-go system was implemented, to 1999 broken down into age groups similarly to the base year. Since we were working with incomplete data we had to make several assumptions in order to draw up yearly age profiles (see the details in Gál and Tarcali 2003).

The results coincide with international experience¹⁸ and show significant redistribution favorable to the first generations that enter the system. We noted the values of the benefit/tax ratio¹⁹ by cohort in Figure 2. Again, the bold curve represents the pre-reform case. The figure clearly shows that those born after 1880, the first to enter the system, approximately 50 year-groups, came out winners in the pension system. The deeper the curve sinks into negative regions the bigger the lifetime-pensions compared to lifetime-contributions, that is the larger the net profits. This profit increases for the first 20-25 years continuously. Later it decreases yet remains profitable up to the now 70 year olds. From there on however, the system is a lose for every year-group. The largest net lifetime-contributors are those born between 1940 and 1955. The loss will continually decrease for those younger than them.

¹⁸ Similar conclusions were reached by Ståhlberg (1990) for Sweden, Leimer (1994) for the US, Nelissen (1995) for the Netherlands and Börsch-Supan and Reil-Held (2001) for Germany.

¹⁹ PVB/PVT, present value of benefits over present value of contributions.

>>> **Figure 2 here** <<<

It is safe to say that the majority of today's living population, including a sizeable portion of pensioners, is loser in the pay-as-you-go pension system. This conclusion naturally is only true for the representative individuals of year-groups. If we calculate lifetime net contributions according to gender or earnings we would most certainly find more winners, however losers would foot a bigger bill.

The effects of the pension reform on redistribution are displayed by the regular curve in Figure 2. It reveals that the reform favored future generations at the expense of currently living cohorts. The deficit for the as-yet unborn diminished to less than 5 percent of its original value. In contrast, the thirteen cohorts out of the fifteen cohorts born between 1948 and 1962 have to pay \$3,000-3,800 in addition to their lifetime net contributions they would have paid without reform. The highest supplementary charge, \$3,800, to be paid by the 1949 cohort, slowly decreases to 2,000 for the newborn. However, since the original deficit of the after-war generations was proportionately even higher, the percentage change is more serious for the currently young. The net lifetime accounts grew larger than twice of what it would have been without reform.

In general, the 1998 pension reform made currently living cohorts pay for the costs of intergenerational redistribution that favored the first coming generations. Instead of leaving a burdensome inheritance to their successors, those already in the system decided to pay for the bill themselves.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by a grant from the CERGE-EI Foundation under a program of the Global Development Network. Additional funds for grantees in the Balkan countries have been provided by the Austrian Government through WIIW, Vienna. All opinions expressed are those of the authors and have not been endorsed by CERGE-EI, WIIW or the GDN. Additional funds were provided by the East-West Management Institute (EWMI) and OKTK Hungary. The authors are grateful for the Széchenyi Scholarship (Gál) and the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research, Vienna (Tarcali) for financial support.

We acknowledge the important contribution of András Simonovits and comments of two unknown reviewers. We kindly appreciate the research assistance of Béla Janky and cooperation of the Central Administration of the National Pension Insurance and the National Tax Office. All the remaining errors are ours.

References

- 1) Auerbach, A. J., Kotlikoff, L. J. and Leibfritz, W., eds., Generational accounting around the world. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- 2) Auerbach, A. J., Gokhale, J. and Kotlikoff, L. J., Generational accounts – a meaningful alternative to deficit financing, (NBER Working Paper 3589), Cambridge MA, 1991a.
- 3) Auerbach, A. J., Gokhale, J. and Kotlikoff, L. J., Social security and Medicare policy from the perspectives of generational accounting, (NBER Working Paper 3915), Cambridge MA, 1991b.
- 4) Augusztinovics, M., Gál, R.I., Matits, Á., Máté, L. and Stahl, J., The Hungarian pension reform before and after the 1998 reform, Budapest: ILO, 2002.
- 5) Benczúr, P., Changes in the implicit debt burden of the Hungarian social security system. (NBH Working Paper Series 8), Budapest: National Bank of Hungary, 1999.
- 6) Boll, S., Raffelhüschen, B. and Walliser, J., “Social security and intergenerational redistribution: a generational accounting perspective,” Public Choice, Vol. 81 (1994), pp. 79-100.
- 7) Bonin, H., Gil, J, and Patxot, C., “Beyond the Toledo agreement: the intergenerational impact of the Spanish pension reform”, Spanish Economic Review, Vol. 3. No. 2 (2001).
- 8) Börsch-Supan, A. and Reil-Held, A., “How much is transfer and how much is insurance in a pay-as-you-go system? The German case”, Scandinavian Journal of Economics, 103 (2001), pp. 505-24.
- 9) Cardarelli, R., Sefton, J. and Kotlikoff L.J., Generational accounting in the UK. (London: NIESR, 1999), <http://www.niesr.ac.uk/niesr/discuss.htm#dp147>.
- 10) Fehr, H. and Kotlikoff, L. J., “Generational accounting in general equilibrium”, in: Auerbach, A.J., Kotlikoff, L.J. and Leibfritz, W., eds., 1999, pp. 43-71.

- 11) Gál, R., Mogyorósy, Z., Szende, A. and Szivós, P., Study on the social protection systems in the 13 applicant countries, country study Hungary, (Study financed by the European Commission – DG Employment and Social Affairs – implemented by GVG/LSE), Brussels, 2003.
- 12) Gál, R.I., Simonovits, A. and Tarcali, G., Generational accounting and Hungarian pension reform, (Social Protection Discussion Paper Series 0127), Washington DC: The World Bank, 2001.
- 13) Gál, R.I. and Tarcali, G., “Intergenerational redistribution” (In Hungarian), in Gál, R.I. ed., Fathers and sons and grandsons. Intergenerational flow of income and wealth, (Budapest: Osiris, 2003), pp. 87-119.
- 14) Holzmann, R., Palacios, R. and Zviniene, A., Implicit pension debt: issues, measurement, and scope in international perspective, (The World Bank Pension Reform Primer), Washington DC: The World Bank, 2001.
- 15) Leimer, D.R., Cohort-specific measures of lifetime net social security transfers, (Social Security Administration Office of Research and Statistics Working Paper 59), Washington DC, 1994.
- 16) Marin, B., Stefanits, H. and Tarcali, G., Learning from partner: an Austro-European View, [http://wbln0018.worldbank.org/HDNet/HDdocs.nsf/5b9b9684435b3a4585256c05000515ab/c01b5a09541cf06885256a9c006b384a/\\$FILE/Hungary%20by%20Austria.pdf](http://wbln0018.worldbank.org/HDNet/HDdocs.nsf/5b9b9684435b3a4585256c05000515ab/c01b5a09541cf06885256a9c006b384a/$FILE/Hungary%20by%20Austria.pdf), 2001.
- 17) Müller, K., The political economy of pension reform in Central-Eastern Europe. Cheltenham UK: Edward Elgar, 1999.
- 18) Müller, K., Privatising old-age security: Latin America and Eastern Europe compared, (Frankfurter Institut für Transformationsstudien Discussion Papers), Frankfurt, 2002.
- 19) Nelissen, J.H.M., "Lifetime income redistribution by social security," Journal of Population Economics, Vol. 8 pp. 89-105.

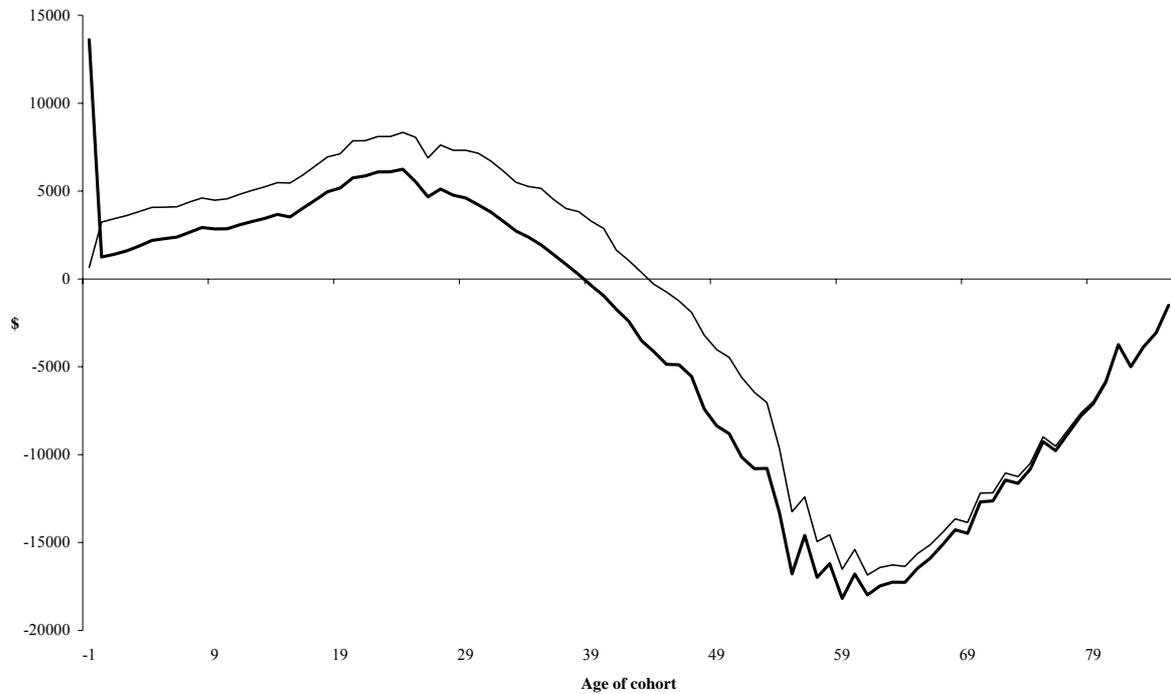
- 20) Nelson, J.M., "The politics of pension and health care delivery reforms in Hungary and Poland," in Kornai, J., Haggard, S. and Kaufman, R.R., eds., Reforming the state. Fiscal and welfare reform in post-socialist countries, (Cambridge MA: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 235-266.
- 21) OECD, Maintaining prosperity in an ageing society, Paris: OECD, 1998.
- 22) Orenstein, M., How politics and institutions affect pension reform in three post-communist countries, (Policy Research Working Paper No. 2310), Washington DC: World Bank, 2000.
- 23) Raffelhüschen, B. "Generational accounting: method, data and limitations," in European Commission, European economy: generational accounting in Europe, pp. 17-28.
- 24) Rocha, R., Gutierrez, J. and Hinz, R. Improving the regulation and supervision of pension funds: Are there lessons from the banking sector?, (Washington DC: World Bank, 1999), mimeo.
- 25) Rocha, R. and Vittas, D., "The Hungarian pension reform: a preliminary assessment," in Feldstein, M. and Siebert, H., eds., Social security reforms in Europe, (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002), forthcoming.
- 26) Simonovits, A., "The new Hungarian pension system and its problems," In: Müller, K., Ryll, A. and Wagener, H-J., eds., Transformation of social security: pensions in Central-Eastern Europe, (Heidelberg: Physica, 1999), pp. 211-230.
- 27) Spéder, Zs., "Hungary: getting better and becoming more dissimilar," in Stanovnik, T., Stropnik, N. and Princz, Ch., eds., Economic well-being of the elderly. (London: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 53-95.
- 28) Ståhlberg, A-C., "Lifecycle income redistribution of the public sector: inter- and intragenerational effects," in: Persson, I., ed., Generating equality in the welfare state: the Swedish experience. (Oslo: The Norwegian University Press, 1990), pp. 97-121.

29) Toldi, M., "Factors effecting entry pensions in 1998," (In Hungarian), in Augusztinovics, M. ed., The post-reform scene, (Budapest: Közgazdasági Szemle Alapítvány, 2000), pp. 116-154.

Figure 1

Generational pension accounts without and with pension reform

(2000 present values)



Age -1 refers to future generations

bold curve: generational pension accounts without pension reform

regular curve: generational pension accounts after pension reform

Table 1**Generational pension accounts for selected cohorts under different reform measures**

(Thousands of US dollars)

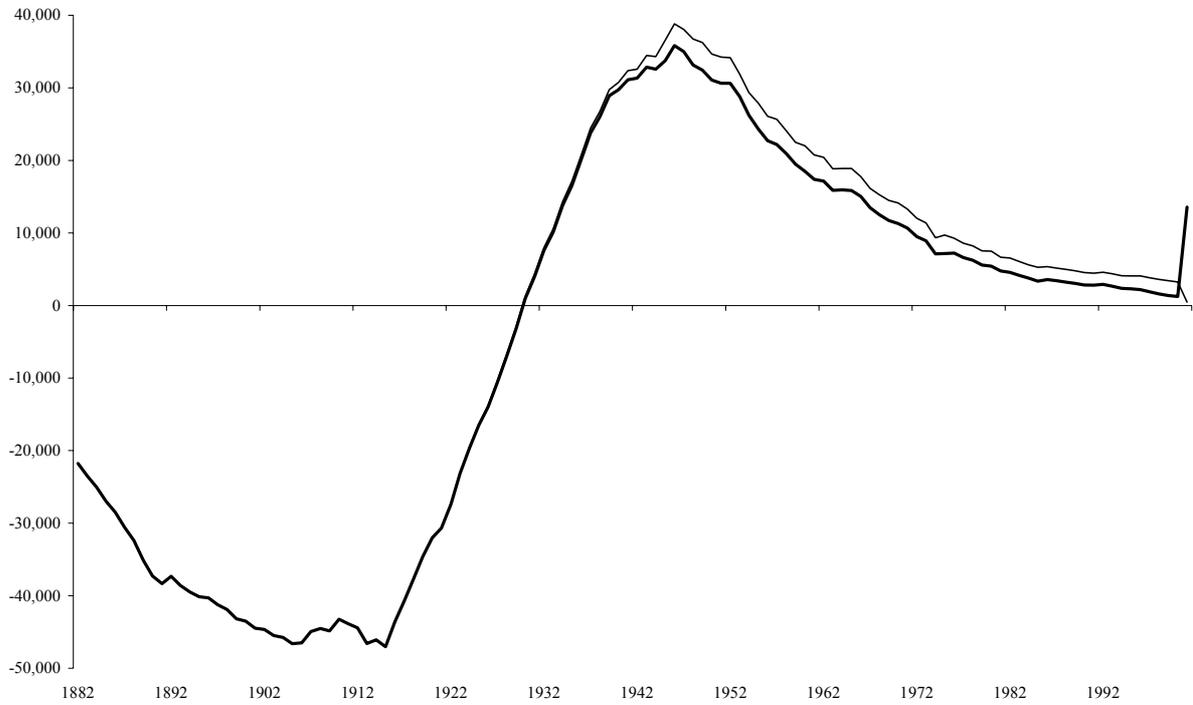
age of cohort	no reform	Swiss indexation	completed retirement age adjustment*	phasing out degressiveness from pension formula	new scale of accrual rates	partial pre-funding	complete reform
future	13.6	7.2	7.8	14.8	12.0	10.6	0.6
0	1.2	3.0	2.1	1.1	1.6	1.2	3.2
10	2.9	4.5	3.7	2.7	3.2	2.6	4.6
20	5.7	7.7	7.1	5.5	6.2	5.4	7.9
30	4.2	6.1	5.9	3.9	4.8	4.1	7.1
40	-1.0	1.0	1.4	-1.4	-0.2	-0.8	2.9
50	-8.8	-7.1	-5.6	-9.3	-8.8	-8.8	-4.5
60	-16.8	-15.7	-16.3	-17.1	-16.8	-16.8	-15.4
70	-12.7	-12.2	-12.7	-12.7	-12.7	-12.7	-12.2
80	-5.9	-5.8	-5.9	-5.9	-5.9	-5.9	-5.8
absolute generational imbalance	12.4	4.2	5.8	13.7	10.5	9.4	-2.6

Note: discount rate: 5%. productivity growth rate: 1.5%. real interest rate: 4%. population projection: Central Statistical Office Demography Research Institute.

* Completed: the calculation started from 2000, so it does not take into account the effects of previous retirement age increases.

Figure 2

Retrospective generational pension accounts without and with pension reform



Age -1 refers to future generations

bold curve: lifetime generational pension accounts without pension reform

regular curve: lifetime generational pension accounts after pension reform