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## TRANSCARPATHIAN WOMEN IN FAMILY AND SOCIETY DURING THE SOVIET ERA

*In the 1930s, during forced rapid industrialization and later during the war, women in the USSR were forced to perform male-dominated tasks, including driving tractors. Behind the mask of emancipation, these campaigns played a significant role in increasing agricultural production and spreading socialist ideology. Women performed difficult, physically demanding tasks that required technical knowledge, often under harsh weather conditions and sometimes even at night, regardless of their health. With the Red Army's arrival in Transcarpathia in autumn 1944, the construction of the Soviet system began, showing no mercy for its victims. This marked one of the most difficult periods for the Hungarian community there. This research aims to analyse the status and role of Transcarpathian women during the Soviet era through the interaction between Soviet gender policies and local cultural traditions, to elucidate how they combined professional activities and family responsibilities, and determine the influence of the region's ethnocultural diversity on female identity formation. The role of Transcarpathian women was influenced by both Soviet policies and the region's unique cultural characteristics. Transcarpathia was incorporated into the Soviet Union. The Soviet government promoted gender equality, encouraging women to participate in education, work, and politics. However, while women worked outside the home, traditional roles of motherhood and homemaking remained strong. Transcarpathian women were integrated into the workforce, working in agriculture, state-run industries, textiles, healthcare, and education. Many participated in collective farming, a significant part of the Soviet economy. Despite this involvement, women were still expected to manage household chores, children, and family members. The USSR provided benefits like maternity leave and daycare, but the double burden of work and family responsibilities persisted. Family structure in Transcarpathia remained relatively traditional. In addition to hard physical work, women were seen as central to maintaining household traditions. The patriarchal structure remained despite Soviet calls for gender equality. The Soviet Union promoted the family as a social institution, encouraging women to marry young and have children. Girls were often expected to follow traditional paths, including early marriage and motherhood. Nevertheless, education was significant, with many women completing secondary and some higher education. Political participation remained limited for most women, though some opportunities existed within the Communist Party. Women were often excluded from the highest levels of power. The Soviet state provided healthcare and social services, which impacted women's lives significantly. Maternity care, healthcare for children, and educational opportunities were benefits, but women still faced work-life balance challenges. Rural women faced different challenges than urban counterparts. Rural women engaged more in agriculture and domestic tasks, while urban women had better access to educational and professional opportunities. However, societal pressure to adhere to traditional gender roles existed everywhere. The legacy of Soviet policies had a lasting impact. While women gained access to education and employment, traditional expectations as wives and mothers persisted, influenced by both Soviet policies and the region's rich cultural heritage.*

**Keywords:** *Soviet gender policy, women's equality, female workforce, Women's Council, Socialist competition.*

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## ЗАКАРПАТСЬКЕ ЖІНОЦТВО В СІМ'Ї ТА СУСПІЛЬСТВІ ЗА РАДЯНСЬКОЇ ДОБИ

У 1930-х рр., під час форсованої індустріалізації та пізніше під час війни, жінки в Радянському Союзі – переважно в сільському господарстві – були змушені виконувати чоловічі роботи, включно з водінням тракторів. Жінки виконували, фізично виснажливі завдання, що потребували технічних знань, часто за складних погодних умов і вночі, без огляду на власне здоров'я. Метою дослідження є комплексний аналіз статусу та ролі закарпатських жінок у радянську добу крізь призму взаємодії радянської гендерної політики та локальних культурних традицій, з'ясування особливостей, як вони поєднували професійну діяльність та сімейні обов'язки, а також визначення впливу етнокультурної розмаїтості регіону на формування жіночої ідентичності в контексті радянської суспільної модернізації.

**Ключові слова:** радянська гендерна політика, рівність жінок, жіноча робоча сила, Жіноча рада, соціалістичне змагання.

**Problem statement.** In the 1930's, during the forced rapid industrialization and later during the war, women in the Soviet Union – primarily in agriculture – were forced to perform male-dominated tasks, including driving tractors. Behind the mask of emancipation, these campaigns, with their well-designed posters, played a significant role in increasing agricultural production and spreading socialist ideology. Women performed difficult, physically demanding tasks that required technical knowledge, often working under harsh weather conditions and sometimes even at night, without regard for their health.

Due to the immense demand for female labour, the USSR, with its 1936 Stalinist Constitution, became the first in the world to enshrine gender equality between men and women: «*This magnificent code of human rights, which is eternal, unequivocally states the complete equality of women with men in all areas of political, economic, and cultural life*» (Vörös, 1947c).

With the appearance of the Red Army in Transcarpathia in the autumn of 1944, the construction of the Soviet system began, showing no mercy for its victims. This marked one of the most difficult periods in the history of the Hungarian community living here. Councils were established, and the land issue was addressed in an arbitrary manner. They initiated mandatory grain deliveries, forced collectivization, nationalized everything, persecuted the historical churches and those who thought differently. During the ethnic cleansings, the Hungarian and German men were deported for a 3-day forced labour. The Germans were deported in several waves (Держархів Закарпатської обл. Ф. Р-14. Оп. 1. Спр. 1. Арк. 3, 5, 7–8; Од. зб. 23. Арк. 1–17; Од. зб. 22. 1–25; Од. зб. 54. Арк. 1–10; Од. зб. 122. Арк. 1–5; Од. зб. 123. Арк. 1–33; Од. зб. 124. Арк. 1–50; Од. зб. 126. Арк. 1; Спр. 3485. Арк. 97–99, 216–222).

**The works analysis.** Briefly, certain aspects of the problem were touched upon by R. Ofitsynskij (Oficinskij, 2010), but overall, the history of women in Berehove and its district during the Soviet period has not been the subject of separate research.

**The aim of the research** is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the status and role of Transcarpathian women during the Soviet era through the lens of interaction between Soviet gender policies and local cultural traditions, to elucidate

the peculiarities of how they combined professional activities and family responsibilities, as well as to determine the influence of the region's ethnocultural diversity on the formation of female identity in the context of Soviet societal modernization.

On November 19, 1944, the Carpathian Ukrainian Communist Party was founded, and the region was named Zakarpatska Ukraina, or Transcarpathian Ukraine. On June 29, 1945, the Czechoslovak and Soviet governments signed an agreement in Moscow, under which Transcarpathia was officially transferred to the USSR (Держархів Закарпатської обл. Ф. Р-14. Оп. 1. Од. зб. 13. Арк. 1–2; Vida & Zseliczky, 2004). On January 22, 1946, it was reorganized as the region of the UkrSSR, under the name Transcarpathian Region (Закарпатська область), where it remained until the collapse of the USSR in 1991 (Oficinskij, 2010: 217).

During the process of Sovietization (Sovietization), in accordance with the 1936 Constitution, the principle of gender equality between men and women was also applied to women in Transcarpathia. This was primarily due to the fact that, after the war, female labour was essential for increasing production, rebuilding the country's economy, supporting the extensive economic policies, and facilitating strong industrialization. Over time, it also contributed to the Soviet economic and social reforms. «[...] *With our liberation, the women living in the Carpathian region became active participants in public life, as fully equal citizens with men. Among the women of the Carpathian region, Hanna Petrisce sits in the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, while Borbála Csernicsika and Hanna Szeljancsina are elected representatives in the Supreme Soviet of the Ukrainian SSR. In the field of maternity and child protection, our Soviet homeland is a world leader. [...] Of course, the women of the Carpathian region also benefit from such support [...]*» (Vörös, 1947c) – we can read in the press.

The state, which relied on the commitment of women, systematically emphasized the existence of equal rights for men and women as enshrined in Soviet laws. «[...] *Before the Soviet system, in our region, women were deprived of their rights [...]; they women were condemned to engage in second-class work [...] or solely focus on household duties. The Soviet system, the Stalinist Constitution, brought freedom and equality to women, revealing to them the limitless possibilities for development*» (Vörös, 1953a).

Reports from the many women grateful for their equality were repeatedly published, comparing the past with the present: «*The all-powerful masters of the past, the bailiff and the notary, often treated us harshly. During strikes, they even beat us with rubber truncheons. Our situation has completely changed since the liberation. Today, we are equal to men, we can freely choose and be chosen [...]. We carry out our tasks with great enthusiasm and happiness because we have received all the freedom, we longed for over many years. Eternal thanks and gratitude for this to our dear father, Comrade Stalin!*» (Vörös, 1947e).

The issue of equality was purposefully reinforced by a lecture series that showcased «*the care of the Lenin-Stalin party and the Soviet state for the political education and cultural development of Soviet women*». Additionally, the situation of women in the socialist camp countries was contrasted with that of women in capitalist

countries (ЦДАГОУ. Ф. 1. Оп. 74. Спр. 4. Арк. 79). «[...] *In capitalist countries, women live in oppression. In most capitalist nations, women do not have the right to vote, nor the opportunity to develop their abilities and pursue careers of their own choosing [...]*» (Vörös, 1952a). «[...] *In capitalism, the law does not recognize the equality of women and men [...] the woman is a domestic slave, oppressed by the extremely petty, rough, difficult, and dull work of the kitchen and the private household in general [...]*» (Vörös, 1960b) – they reinforced the citizens' consciousness.

The formation of the image of women and their role in the consciousness of citizens in Soviet society was officially shaped by the state and the party. They defined and presented the role of women in the construction of socialist society. It was constantly emphasized that a woman in the USSR was «*an equal citizen of socialist society, a great strength of Soviet society*». The role of women was highlighted in the rise of agriculture, the post-war reconstruction of industry, the establishment of the kolkhoz system, the struggle for the organizational and economic strengthening of kolkhozes, and the heroism of female kolkhoz workers was glorified. Their key role in public administration, their tasks in implementing five-year plans, the struggle for the realization of the five-year plan in four years, the experiences of industrial and agricultural women's councils in the fight for the new economic and cultural well-being of the socialist homeland, their role in science and art, etc., were outlined (ЦДАГОУ. Ф. 1. Оп. 74. Спр. 4. Арк. 79). At the same time, the moral image of Soviet women was also given attention.

Special compilations were created about the work of women in government leadership, as representatives of the USSR Supreme Soviet and members of the executive committees of the councils. «*The masses cannot be involved in politics if women are not involved in politics*» (Lenin, n.d: 163; Vörös, 1960b), were the words of V. I. Lenin, quoted in the press. The female recipients of the title of Hero of Socialist Labor, the Stalin Prize winners, the heroic mothers etc. were regularly showcased (ЦДАГОУ. Ф. 1. Оп. 74. Спр. 4. Арк. 77).

In order to ensure that claims of women's equality in all areas, including party and state leadership, did not appear unfounded, local officials were repeatedly instructed to develop women's party activism and increase the number of women in state bodies. However, these instructions were not always followed by local leadership. Reports repeatedly pointed out the clear differences between men and women among the leaders (Держархів Закарпатської обл. Ф. 1. Оп. 5. Спр. 102. Арк. 1–42; Спр. 104. Арк. 1–118; Спр. 117. Арк. 1–63; Спр. 118. Арк. 1–63; Спр. 119. Арк. 1–213; Спр. 120. Арк. 1–169).

In the listed «women's roles» topics, materials for lectures, reports, and discussions were developed to assist the work of lecturers and agitators. These were intended to be presented to female audiences. These topics illustrated the state's needs and plans in the shaping of public opinion and demonstrated the socially acceptable models and mindset offered to Soviet women.

Reports were regularly published about the importance of women's activities and their achievements at both the state and local levels. «*In the past, it was believed that a woman's place was by the stove. Today, the situation is entirely different.*

*Women actively participate in political and social life, in the work of state administrative bodies [...], they lead in production, management [...]*» (Vörös, 1960b).

Through active and systematic propaganda work via the press and radio, as well as extensive agitation – both in meetings held in small groups at enterprises and organizations and during numerous mass meetings with activists from various sectors of the economy – an effective female activism was developed. The idea that women should not work in social production completely disappeared from Soviet consciousness (Айвазова, 1998; Кузнецова, 1980; Курганов, 1968; Пушкарева, 2007).

Special attention was given to portraying women as ideal productive workers. The ideas of female activists, which were repeatedly emphasized, addressed every Soviet woman: «*We must start working with new strength, we are capable of it, and we must prove that we can participate in public life and the restoration of the economy on an equal level with men*» (ЦДАГОУ. Ф. 1. Оп. 74. Спр. 2. Арк. 77); «*Our hearts are filled with joy, as the Soviet government has given us the opportunity to be full members and to master any craft. Our women have every opportunity to participate in the implementation of the five-year plan on equal terms with men*» (ЦДАГОУ. Ф. 1. Оп. 74. Спр. 2. Арк. 5).

The image of the Soviet woman as a male counterpart in the everyday socialist «struggle» (for the production plan, for order in the streets, to win socialist competitions) gradually transformed from an object of pride into a part of everyday life. By the 1960s, women were working in industry alongside men, without the need for heroic symbolism. And it was precisely this equality that became part of the value orientation of Soviet women (Барсукова, 2001).

Accordingly, during the Soviet era, women were granted legal equality. However, the official ideology of equality masked the actual discrimination women faced in all areas of life. Unspoken, there existed a kind of state-sanctioned social gender contract. A woman officially had the same rights as her husband, could receive any education, and work in any position, but the family remained the foundation of her activities. Since the state assigned two roles to women: working woman and a mother, – the term «*working mother contract*» began to be used (Кісь, 2007; Суковатая, 2009).

The post-war demographic situation of the Ukrainian SSR was characterized by an imbalance between the male and female population, especially regarding the working-age population (5.6 million). The number of men was half that of women (Панченко, 1997: 108). In Transcarpathia, based on the 1959 census, out of 920,173 people, 481,828 were women and 438,345 were men (Народне господарство, 1964: 12–13). As a result of it, the role of women had to be strengthened: «*the Soviet woman is the builder (active and equal) of socialist society*». Consequently, women worked to fulfil the tasks of the Communist Party, even in the most challenging sectors of industrial production. Among them were excellent coal miners, locksmiths, machinists (Коваль, 1970), coopers and welders (Дудник, 2005).

The state's goal was to involve women in industry, agriculture, and other sectors (Vörös, 1958a). And this was achieved, with women being entrusted with

scientific, technical, and numerous other leadership positions, using them as a political tool that contributed to the spread of socialist ideals and the consolidation of the social order.

The women of Transcarpathia mainly engaged in various agricultural tasks: harvesting, sowing, animal husbandry, and also participated in various industrial processing jobs. More than half of the workers in the kolkhozes established in the region were women. «[...] *The women's issue in the kolkhozes is an important issue, comrades [...]. Women represent a great force in the kolkhozes. To keep this force hidden is a crime. It is our duty to promote women in the kolkhozes and give space to this power [...]*» (J. V. Sztálin, 1933; Sztálin, n.d: 533–534). «[...] *The women of the Transcarpathian region, together with all the women of the country, enjoy the great freedom and opportunities provided by the Soviet system in the great friendly family of Soviet peoples [...]. In particular, the women of our region are heavily involved in kolkhoz production. With their work results, they have gained national fame [...]*» (Vörös, 1951c). – This is what local residents could read and hear repeatedly.

As for industrial work, in our region, women primarily worked in the light and food industries, textile and clothing industries, but they were also present in the chemical, heavy, machine, electrical engineering, iron, metal, and other industrial sectors. Many even worked in the mines.

In Transcarpathia, viticulture was an important industry, so many women worked in wineries, mainly bottling or packaging the beverages (Vörös, 1958a).

For example, at the May Day furniture manufacturing plant in Berehove, there were several women working as masters, and many women operated grinding machines and circular saws (Vörös, 1952b).

In the construction industry of Transcarpathia, women primarily worked in brick and tile factories. Ilona Koszter was the first to obtain a kiln master's qualification at the Berehove No. 1 Brick Factory. Performing hard physical labour, she fired bricks in 18 kilns daily, completing her tasks at 150–170 percent of the required output. In the same factory, the tile-pressing brigade led by Irén Bence produced 1,800–2,000 extra tiles per day, surpassing the planned quota (Vörös, 1950a).

During the Soviet era, lignite (brown coal) was extracted from six mines in Ilinca (Iloncai, Ilosva district) and two in Berezinka (Nyírhalom, Munkács district) in Transcarpathia. At the Berezinka mine of the Munkács Mining Directorate, Mária Hajcsuk, as an electric trolley driver, performed outstanding Stakhanovite work. She also worked in the architectural brigade of the Berehove No. 1 Architectural-Assembly Directorate, where she was one of the best workers on the construction site, operating the mortar mixing machine (Vörös, 1960d).

Not only in Transcarpathia, but women from our region also worked far from home, helping to build «an even more beautiful Soviet future». For example, Mária Kolozsi from Berehove worked together with her brother, István Kolozsi, in the coal mine of the Marijevka settlement in the Popajovsk district of Voroshilovgrad region (Vörös, 1953b).

One could continue at length listing the exemplary successes of the women of Transcarpathia, who achieved outstanding results and were present in every sector of

the national economy (Table 1).

*Table 1. The percentage of women in the sectors of the national economy (Козіко, 1957: 124)*

Year	1950	1955	1956
<b>National economy total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>34</b>
Of which			
Industry	16	23	24
Construction industry	11	16	21
Machine and tractor stations	4	9	4
State farms and agricultural auxiliary enterprises	42	54	52
Communication and transportation	11	14	15
Trade, procurement, material and technical supply	24	34	36
Public catering	55	59	61
Education	60	65	66
Health care	79	79	80
State and economic administration bodies, state organizations, credit institutions, and insurance agencies apparatus	32	39	40

Young girls, particularly those who were members of the Komsomol and not yet burdened by family responsibilities, responded relatively more easily to the emerging social demands. They were primarily mobilized, along with men, to expand the facilities of heavy industry, and were involved in numerous public works organized for the construction of cities, roads, socially significant buildings, etc. They eagerly joined industrial training programs, acquired various trades, and started working according to employment plans.

The lack of material well-being and livelihood sources, the desire to be recognized as a «normal Soviet citizen», and to prove one's innocence (this behaviour was typical among the descendants of the «enemies of the people» and repatriates in the USSR), the necessity of changing one's place of residence in order to escape the tight control of the system – these and many other factors forced people to take on any kind of work, disregarding personal preferences: working in kolkhozes for workdays, traveling far from home according to organized labour distribution assignments, or attending one of the many training courses or educational institutions within the workforce reserve system.

Providing appropriate education and training for women was important to the leaders for ensuring high-quality work performance, keeping economic development in mind. There were various courses available to choose from: healthcare, agriculture, sewing, basic chemistry, and so on (Vörös, 1960a). In addition, there were self-education circles, agrotechnical circles, and kolkhoz universities, where lectures were given by scientists, qualified agronomists, kolkhoz peasants – «masters of bountiful harvests» – and Heroes of Socialist Labour, among others. The success of these programs was also reported by neighbouring countries (Romániai Magyar Szó, 1950).

The situation was more difficult for those women who did not have an

education and, for various reasons, could not afford the luxury of studying. As a result, they were employed in tasks that did not require specialized training (Table 2).

*Table 2. The proportion of the population by educational attainment in Transcarpathia, according to the data from the January 15, 1959 census (Народне господарство: 10)*

Category	Total	Male	Female
Completed higher education	8,596	4,959	3,637
Incomplete higher and secondary education (including incomplete secondary)	202,996	97,921	105,075
Of which:			
Incomplete higher education	5,386	2,516	2,870
Specialized secondary education	24,055	9,886	14,169
General secondary education	30,932	14,448	16,484
Incomplete secondary education	142,623	71,071	71,552
General and incomplete seven-year education	237,302	115,837	121,465

The educated women, leaders in their work, could quickly become group, farm, or brigade leaders, and could even rise to the positions of collective farm chairperson or Council president or representative (Держархів Закарпатської обл. Ф. 1. Оп. 1. Спр. 3238. Арк. 1–13). For example, Iván Margit, the group leader of the Beregi Lenin Collective Farm (Berehove district) – whose corn cultivation methods were widely spread – was initially a representative of the village Soviet and was later elected as its president (Vörös, 1949).

Women often worked hard, but they did not earn enough to make a living. The minimal amounts left from their salaries were invested in household self-sufficiency, especially in rural areas, and this helped them survive. While managing the household economy, women had to work a second shift, which was not valued and for which they were not paid, unlike their primary job. At the same time, they had to seek supplementary income sources, such as selling goods produced on their household plots at city markets, raising livestock, sewing clothes on order, or weaving rough linen sheets, towels, etc., on home looms.

The double burden of women was increasingly acknowledged even in official documents. The October 1966 decree of the Central Committee of the CPSU called for the fight against feudal treatment of women and the creation of conditions to overcome everyday inequalities (Барсукова, 2001).

Family and childbearing significantly limited women's mobility. It was difficult to meet work plans while taking care of a young child. Therefore, across the country, the restoration of the network of nurseries and kindergartens showed improvement by the early 1950s. «[...] Year by year, the expenditures for the construction of schools, kindergartens, and nurseries are also increasing [...]» (Vörös, 1954; Vörös, 1959). «[...] Public canteens, nurseries, kindergartens, which are truly suitable for freeing women [...] to reduce and eliminate the inequality that exists in the situation of women compared to men in terms of their participation in social production and social life [...]» (Lenin, 1970: 23–24).

The party leadership, through propaganda, suggested that «housewives» were

not as useful members of society as working mothers. It encouraged women to join the workforce more actively, but at the same time emphasized the importance of childbirth, elevating the mother of many children as a role model. On July 8, 1944, the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union passed a decree on the protection of women and motherhood, increasing state support for pregnant women, mothers of many children, and single mothers. Mothers received a one-time special state allowance after the birth of their third child (before the war, this was only provided after the birth of the seventh child). Single mothers began to receive allowances after the birth of their first child. Various benefits were provided until the child reached the age of 1 to 5 (Vörös, 1946a). The law was extended to Transcarpathia as well, and on February 25, 1946, the first aid for mothers of many children was provided (Vörös, 1946c; Vörös, 1946e).

Mothers with many children and single mothers received state support several times a year. The mothers of many children were awarded as «Heroic Mother» (for 10 or more children), «Maternal Glory» (after the 5<sup>th</sup> child), and the «Order of Maternal Merit». In 1947, 754 mothers of many children and 138 single mothers in Transcarpathia received state assistance (Vörös, 1946b).

During Stalin's time, women who sought an abortion and those who performed or assisted in it were sentenced to prison, as abortion was prohibited by the 1936 Constitution. Due to the lack of contraception and the abortion ban, the birth rate rose, as did the number of children born from both wanted and unwanted pregnancies. After Stalin's death, the abortion policy relaxed, and on November 23, 1955, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet legalized abortion. However, women who chose abortion were still socially condemned.

To avoid losing their social status, women were unwilling to have many children. The trend of having 1–2 children per family became permanent, which allowed women to return to work relatively quickly after a short period of maternity leave.

A woman's social status increasingly depended on the success of her children and her «maternal talent», which was an additional burden, a social pressure on women, that men did not have to face. Alongside breastfeeding, child-rearing, shopping for clothes, cooking, teaching the children, and familiarizing them with the communist values, women were also responsible for their children's education, ensuring their success, shaping the customs for spending leisure time in a cultured manner (Айвазова, 2001). The implementation of government and party tasks related to the work of women was carried out through the establishment of a widespread network of women's organizations: there were delegate meetings and women's councils with various sections.

Especially in the villages of the western regions of the Ukrainian SSR, at the local level, women's councils and the women's department of the political committees organized local meetings for the purpose of presenting various reports and resolutions (the speakers were usually district representatives or local teachers). They monitored the landscaping and greening of the settlements, actively participated in organizing people for the spring sowing campaign, worked in the kolkhoz farms, campaigned for the purchase of state loans, etc.

The women's councils in different regions had various unique, specific tasks, which primarily depended on the government's policy in one or another economic region of Ukraine, and thus also in Transcarpathia (Держархів Закарпатської обл. Ф. 1. Оп. 1. Спр. 2891. Арк. 1–22; Спр. 2892. Арк. 1–21; Спр. 2299. Арк. 1–57; Спр. 2300. Арк. 1–116; Спр. 2301. Арк. 1–143).

Starting from 1946, the Women's Councils began to be established in greater numbers in Transcarpathia. According to the communist authorities, the Women's Councils were expected to guide the women of Transcarpathia on the path leading to the true *«practical fulfilment of women's equality»* (Vörös, 1946d). The Women's Councils were established at the local level across the USSR to more effectively support local women's communities, and thus, nearly every Transcarpathian settlement had its own Women's Council (Vörös, 1958b).

The Women's Councils played a significant role in ensuring that, in line with Soviet political goals, the female workforce could effectively participate in the economic construction, contributing to the development of socialist society. In other words, they acted as organizations that promoted women's employment. *«[...] Those women who join the Women's Council will see that from now on, they can take their fate and the resolution of their daily tasks into their own hands, because women's issues can only be understood and solved most clearly through a woman's perspective. The affairs of children also require a woman's heart and experience [...] But for them to be able to help, they must also develop, learn, and understand the essence of socialism [...]»* (Vörös, 1946d) – this was the message in the campaign to recruit members to the council.

On June 21, 1947, there were already 47 councils operating in the Berehove district alone, with 10 in the city of Berehove. The Women's Councils were led by a chairwoman elected through a public vote, with the help of a vice-chair and a secretary. The councils included several specialized committees and sub-divisions, such as production, healthcare, commerce, cultural, educational, etc., each led by an appointed leader. Women who were politically enlightened and pioneers in their work, particularly those involved in collective farms, were chosen as the chairwoman, vice-chairwoman, secretary, and members of the councils. For example, the head of the women's organizing department of the Berehove district UK(b)P committee was Katalin Svordák. Her tasks included regularly visiting and supporting the Women's Councils, providing them with model plans, organizing district meetings, and coordinating the work in towns and work communities where no Women's Council yet existed, or helping to establish them (Vörös, 1947d).

The Women's Councils carried out their work under the guidance of the local party organizations, which continually emphasized that *«the task of the Women's Councils is to educate working women under the direction of the party organizations, in the spirit of Soviet patriotism, interethnic friendship, and devotion to the Lenin-Stalin party»* (Vörös, 1953a).

The party organization had the duty to assist in the preparation of the councils' work plans, approve them at party meetings, and call a general meeting at least once a month, where party members could suggest observations, additions, and modifications to the plans. The chairwoman was required to report on the council's

work, its results, and, not least, submit a protocol to the district party committee's women's department. «*The Women's Councils can only carry out successful activities and fulfil the tasks ahead of them if they receive constant and frequent assistance from the primary party organizations*» (Vörös, 1953a).

The Women's Councils had a wide range of responsibilities, such as organizing, directing, and supervising women's work; carrying out extensive agitation, public education, and training among women; raising women's professional skills, political awareness, and cultural standards; and handling maternal and child welfare issues. Members of the Women's Councils formed singing, dance, and theatre groups, and organized various charitable events, cultural performances, and balls multiple times each year. The proceeds from these programs were used to support children in difficult situations. For example, in 1947, a successful theatrical performance was held in Bene (Berehove district). The proceeds from the performance were used to provide winter clothing for 20 half-orphaned children and shoes for poor children (Vörös, 1947a).

The Soviet leadership believed that women should be responsible for organizing and developing child care institutions. Therefore, the Women's Councils had several important tasks in this area as well. «*The establishment of the Women's Council also aims to relieve working women from at least the burdens of household chores, allowing them to work peacefully at their jobs with the assurance that their children are under professional supervision and receiving proper nutrition*» (Vörös, 1960c).

The members of the Women's Councils regularly visited child care institutions. During these visits, they observed how the children were being raised, examined the health and hygiene conditions, and, when necessary, made recommendations and proposals for improving the situation (Vörös, 1947b). They ensured that school-age children attended school on time and did not miss classes, regularly visiting parents. They assisted in the establishment and maintenance of day-care centres, orphanages, kindergartens, nurseries, schools, and maternity homes; paid great attention to the nutrition of schoolchildren, providing clothing and footwear for underprivileged children, supporting mothers with many children and widows (Vörös, 1960c). In the villages they organized literacy courses for the illiterate. Additionally, Ukrainian and Russian language courses were provided for the youth by them (Vörös, 1949).

The Women's Councils had a specific responsibility to address health-related issues in the villages, including advocacy, oversight, and support. Therefore, they participated in two-month healthcare training courses, where they primarily learned the basics of first aid. They regularly visited the residents of the villages, offering health advice, and when necessary, they would request the help of a family doctor.

Communism rejected belief in God, so one of the tasks of the Women's Councils was to promote scientific atheism, which was commonly done through organizing atheist question-and-answer sessions. At these events, participants could learn about the principles of scientific atheism and receive answers to their questions about religion, all in the spirit of rejecting religion (Vörös, 1971b). For example: «*The Women's Council of the Bugyonnij Kolhosp is successfully operating in the field of mass enlightenment work as well. They have successfully changed the attitude*

*of women towards religion. As a result, on Easter Sunday, more than 100 kolhosp women worked on the kolhosp fields» (Vörös, 1950b). «[...] Lectures titled “Religion and Science” and “Religion and Women”, illustrated with appropriate films, attracted a large audience [...]. After all, the collaboration between cinema network workers and cultural workers in the atheist propaganda, as evidenced by the events held in the Gát and the City Cinema, brought positive results [...]*» (Vörös, 1971a).

The council members paid great attention to self-education and learning. In the evenings, they studied together, for example, the Constitution, the electoral regulations, and the resolutions of the Communist Party, so they could perform their agitation work in the districts entrusted to them with adequate preparation. Agitation was considered one of their most fundamental and important tasks. They monitored whether women attended work regularly and whether they fulfilled the required minimum work quotas. By ensuring proper work discipline, they contributed to the increase in production.

They regularly organized meetings for the trailblazers and leadership to exchange experiences and outline future tasks (Vörös, 1946c; Vörös, 1972). This was done not only on a district or county level, but also nationally or even internationally, by gaining insight into the work of the Soviet Women’s Committee (Asszonyok, 1968) and the International Democratic Women’s Union. Naturally, women from other regions also visited the Transcarpathian Women’s Council, and upon returning home, they praised the economic development of our region and the diligent work of the women in the press (Szabad Nép, 1955). In their speeches, the model workers urged all kolhosp women to *«work even harder, strengthen work discipline, increase work efficiency, and produce higher yields»* (ЦДАГОУ. Ф. 1. Оп. 74. Спр. 2. Арк. 53). *«Our collective farms represent our wedding, our joyful life: this is our happiness»* (ЦДАГОУ. Ф. 1. Оп. 74. Спр. 2. Арк. 72) – was the enthusiastic slogan of the propaganda.

Women activists arriving from remote settlements had the opportunity to meet with their colleagues, learn about their problems, and the achievements in fulfilling their set tasks. They also encouraged each other in choosing the right life strategy.

In almost every speech given by the participants of the meetings, personal motivation to achieve success was emphasized. They often expressed hope for improvement in daily life: *«Previously, women were oppressed, they had no idea of any progressive heroic deeds, but now women work in responsible positions, there are female representatives, female socialist labour heroes, and women can be read about in newspapers and magazines»* (ЦДАГОУ. Ф. 1. Оп. 74. Спр. 2. Арк. 61); *«I have been living in the Soviet Union for 4 years. For 4 years I have felt like an equal citizen, I participate in the elections of equal citizens, I am involved in construction, in the rebuilding of my country»* (ЦДАГОУ. Ф. 1. Оп. 74. Спр. 2. Арк. 61), etc.

During their reports, the speakers often emphasized that in the Soviet state, women had equal rights to work and rest, with every opportunity for self-actualization, primarily through high-productivity work and expanding their political worldview: *«I am a Komsomol member, but for me, this is not enough, I want to be a communist, and I am preparing to join the party as a candidate member, so that I can become politically experienced and understand all economic and political issues»*

(ЦДАГОУ. Ф. 1. Оп. 74. Спр. 2. Арк. 54). Both personal desires for improvement in daily life and the necessity of supporting the state and the Communist Party, which, along with its leader, «constantly takes care of its citizens», were used as motivation. At such meetings, women not only articulated their existing motivations but also set new goals for themselves, including tasks such as applying their professional skills or engaging in active community work, which was essential for fulfilling the government's important duties (e.g., the completion of the five-year plan in four years) (Держархів Закарпатської обл. Ф. 1. Оп. 1. Спр. 2711. Арк. 1–160; Спр. 2712. Арк. 1–49).

The Women's Councils did not have actual power or independent decision-making authority; they could only operate by following the instructions of the communist party leadership. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the opportunities for women significantly expanded across all areas of social and economic life.

To achieve higher production indicators, socialist competitions were held in agricultural brigades, livestock farms, factories, and industrial plants. To address labour shortages and meet economic goals, a new ideal of women emerged within the framework of the Stakhanovite movement. The Stakhanovite female workers set an example in work efficiency and productivity, exceeding workplace norms and standards (Vörös, 1950c).

To address labour shortages and achieve economic goals, a new ideal of women emerged within the framework of the Stakhanovite movement. The Stakhanovite female workers set an example in work efficiency and productivity. This new female ideal emphasized that women were capable of acquiring advanced technical and professional knowledge, and could contribute to economic development just as their male colleagues did. Thus, the new female ideal was closely linked to socialist values. Women often appeared older than their age, as a beautiful woman was seen as a «non-working» or even a «light-hearted, easy woman». The awards were typically presented on the occasion of International Women's Day (Vörös, 1960c).

The experiences of the pioneers, front runners were made public on the pages of the press with a motivational purpose, using slogans such as «*Bring the laggards into the ranks of the pioneers, frontrunners!*» (Vörös, 1960c). On the occasion of International Women's Day, other slogans and mottos also appeared on the front pages, such as: «*Long live Soviet women – glorious fighters for peace and friendship among nations!*» (Vörös, 1959), «*Glory to Soviet women, active builders of communism!*» «*Glory to the enthusiastic daughters of the Soviet homeland, active builders of communism, and the leading fighters of the world movement for peace!*», or as quoted from Stalin, «*Such women never existed, and they could not exist in the old days*» (Vörös, 1952a). On these occasions, the newspapers also featured photos of exemplary active working women.

In the field of industry, the Transcarpathian women also did their best to apply the methods of Soviet Stakhanovites. For example, Lidia Korabelnyikova from the «Paris Commune» shoe factory, launched a nationwide movement aimed at material savings. This movement allowed them to work for one day each month and two weeks per year using only saved materials, resulting in the production of 9,000 pairs

of shoes annually. «*At the initiative of Korabelnyikova Lidia, the Berehove clothing factory also started a campaign [...] We saved 8,766 meters of cloth fabric*» (Vörös, 1951a). In the Berehove clothing factory, everyone knew Brigade Leader Kovács Malvin and Katalin Bányász, who led their teams in the Stakhanovite competition by increasing material and electricity savings, and passed on their work experience to other employees (Vörös, 1951b).

**Conclusions.** The role of Transcarpathian women in family and society during the Soviet era was influenced by both Soviet policies and the unique cultural characteristics of the region. Transcarpathia, a diverse area in the western part of Ukraine, was part of the Soviet other populations, shaped the lives of women in various ways. The Soviet government promoted the idea of gender equality, with women encouraged to participate in all aspects of public life, including education, work, and politics. However, while women were urged to work outside the home, the traditional roles of motherhood and homemaking remained strong. In the Soviet era, women in Transcarpathia, as in many parts of the USSR, were integrated into the workforce. Many worked in agriculture, especially in rural areas, or in state-run industries, where they often held jobs in sectors such as textiles, healthcare, and education. Women were also encouraged to participate in collective farming (kolkhoz), a significant part of the Soviet economy. Despite their involvement in the workforce, women were still primarily expected to take care of household chores, children, and family members. The Soviet state did provide certain benefits, such as maternity leave and daycare, but the double burden of work and family responsibilities remained. In Transcarpathia, the family structure tended to be relatively traditional. In addition to hard physical work women were mainly seen as the central figures in maintaining household traditions, including cooking, cleaning, and caring for children. The patriarchal structure of family life remained in place, despite Soviet calls for gender equality. The Soviet Union promoted the importance of the family as a social institution, and women were encouraged to marry young and have children. Girls in Transcarpathia were often expected to follow traditional paths, including early marrying and becoming mothers. Nevertheless, education was a significant factor, and many women in the region went on to complete secondary education and some higher education. In the region, different cultural practices around marriage, family life, and women's roles coexisted. Despite Soviet calls for women's equality, political participation remained limited for most women. There were some opportunities for women in politics and leadership roles within the Communist Party, but women were often excluded from the highest levels of power. The Soviet state provided healthcare and other social services, which had a significant impact on women's lives. Maternity care, healthcare access for children, and educational opportunities were among the benefits, but women still faced challenges related to work-life balance and gender expectations. Rural Transcarpathian women faced different challenges compared to their urban counterparts. Women in rural areas were often more engaged in agriculture and domestic tasks, while those in urban centres had more access to educational and professional opportunities. However, even in cities, women often faced societal pressures to adhere to traditional gender roles. The legacy of Soviet policies on

gender equality had a lasting impact on Transcarpathian women. While many women gained access to education and employment, the expectation of them fulfilling traditional roles as wives and mothers persisted. In summary, Transcarpathian women during the Soviet era faced a unique blend of Soviet gender policies and local cultural traditions. They contributed to the economy and society in various ways, but were also expected to maintain their roles as wives and mothers. Despite Soviet efforts to promote gender equality, many women in the region continued to experience traditional gender expectations, influenced by both Soviet policies and the region's rich cultural heritage.

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