

International Migration of Qualified Human Resources in Social Assistance. Value Dimensions and Professional Dilemmas

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Abstract

International migration of work force is presently a high amplitude phenomenon. Romanian people have emigrated for work around the world, being engaged both in the physically hardest jobs and in activities that require completion of specialized courses and certification in a particular field. This last category includes social workers who, following schooling and certification and even having a minimal experience in the home country, apply for jobs in the field of social assistance. These recruiters aim to distribute social workers at the workplace of interest, according to certain well-defined criteria. In the present paper we describe international migration of work force, and we illustrate it by adding case studies of life experience of social workers who underwent the process of emigration to the United Kingdom. Throughout the emigration process, these workers experienced certain changes in their life principles, mentality, values, and were marked by professional dilemmas in extreme situations.

Keywords: *emigration, work force, social assistance, social worker, professional recruiters, life experience, extreme situations, change, value, dilemma.*

Introduction. International migration of work force

International migration of work force has become increasingly important over the recent years, gaining widespread attention. This phenomenon is generally understood as “the movement of individual people or groups, families, across national borders in the hope of finding better living conditions.”¹ In practical terms, international migration of work force is the movement of work force from one country to another in order to pursue an activity abroad for which migrants

¹ Alexandru Albu and Ion Ro u-Hamzescu, *International labour migration* (Bucharest: tiin ific i Enciclopedic , 1987), 11.

receive payment from physical or legal persons, or other legal entities for which they carry out those activities.

Individually or collectively, people often associate migration with the achievement of aspirations regarding new opportunities, possibilities and certainties. At the individual level, the decision to migrate is the result of a rational calculation of the benefits and costs of emigration for work, compared to the possible achievements in the home country. Collectively, the decision to migration is taken by group members at the initiative of a group leader after analyzing the costs and benefits of emigration and / or remaining in the place of origin. “Spatial differentiation motivates individual movement, which in turn permanently re-arranges population factors, employment, consumption, etc., everywhere it occurs. Agreed analytical framework of migration in terms of attraction – rejection illustrates exactly this gap. Regional differences define the decisional context of the individuals for migration, but the determinants of these territorial features are considered to be exogenous.”²

International migration (market) of work force has a number of important elements:

a) International labor market, comprising all individuals carrying out an economic and social activity outside the country of origin and have their residence in the country in which they activate; payment for their work is assessed by natural or legal persons of the host country;

b) International labor market is smaller than international migration, because the latter also includes people who have left their home country and who are not engaged in a remunerated socio-economic activity. International labor market offers an instant picture of the use of foreign work force, whereas international labor migration is a very large and complex process that highlights developments, trends and aspects of the international labor flow;

c) In addition to international labor migration, international movement of work force also includes the movement of work force across borders within actions related to international economic and technical-scientific cooperation and the movement of international officials.³

Labor migration is temporary, but its duration varies widely and involves no changes of permanent residence. Three categories of emigrants are identified: the first category – emigrants with a higher qualification and skills in the fields of

² Daniel Delaunay, “Les déterminants individuels et contextuels de la migration internationale,” in *Les migrations internationales. Observations, analyse et perspective* (Paris: Press Universitaires de France, 2007), 137.

³ Albu and Ro u-Hamzescu, *International labour migration*, 12.

International Migration of Qualified Human Resources in Social Assistance. Value Dimensions and Professional Dilemmas

science, technology and other services in domains such as health, education, social assistance, etc. These emigrants have the possibility to obtain an employment contract and the right of residence in the country of migration; The second category – emigrants averagely skilled and specialized, characteristic of a wide range of activities and professions (builders, medical personnel, workers employed in the hotel industry or food service, etc.); The third category – emigrants who have no (recognized) qualification and who work in agriculture, construction, sanitation, etc.

There is a number of emigrants working illegally in closed and uncontrolled activities, and this aspect of labor migration cannot be managed, both in the country of origin and in the destination country. Most of these emigrants works and lives in conditions which do not comply with the standards provided to domestic work force. Over the recent years, there has been an increase in permanent migration and temporary labor migration as a result of, “on the one hand, the intensity of the expansion phase in the late 90s and, on the other hand, the development of Information and communication technology, of health and education sectors requiring highly skilled workers.”⁴

An important element of international labor migration is linked to “brain” migration, a phenomenon defined as a constant transfer of highly qualified personnel from generally countries less developed to more developed countries. There are other terms for this phenomenon, such as “brain drain”, “brain theft”, “intelligence theft” or “exodus of competence”, etc. There are two main reasons for the “brain drain”: “on the one hand, the existence of an environment that offers for talented young people a guarantee for the quality of education and international recognition of qualifications. On the other hand, the prospect of higher material incentives and promotion of the most competent people in educational or research institutes and the multinationals.”⁵

The profession of social worker and emigration

Social assistance was developed in Romania particularly after 1989, starting from simple charity and support through the church and other religious institutions up to the implementation of social activities by relevant institutions, NGOs and

⁴ Carmen Mihaela Tudorache, “Evolu ia fenomenului migra iei Europa,” *Theoretical and Applied Economics* 6 (2006) (501): 97.

⁵ Andreea Vass, “Migra ia creierelor române ti între risc i oportunitate,” *OEconomica* 03 (2007): 81.

specific legislation. Social assistance “denominates an ensemble of institutions, programs, measures, professionalized activities, specialized services for the protection of individuals, groups, communities with special needs and in temporary difficulties, which, due to economic, socio-cultural, biological and psychological reasons, are unable to achieve a normal, decent life through their own efforts and means.”⁶

Social assistance is used to support to people in difficulty to achieve a decent life, by helping them to develop their capabilities and skills for better social functioning. The social worker, as a professional, mainly handles with psychosocial recovery and professional reintegration of people with special problems such as mental and / or physical impairment, antisocial behavior (delinquency) and various social problems. He / she carries out a complex and varied activity: analyzes the influence of social factors on mental health and human behavior, gives advice on the rights and obligations of the assisted people, collaborates with institutions or organizations that have similar goals, participates in the development of working methods and techniques, proposes measures of support and help. All activities are conducted with reference to the *Code of Ethics for Social Work* and according to the legislation in force.

According to the Law no. 466 of 2004 on the status of social worker (Paragraph 2), the following persons can be social workers:⁷

1. The person who received a university diploma within a superior studies unit specialized in the field, long length type 4 years, certified according to the law; 2. The person who holds a graduation diploma from a higher education unit specialized in the field, short length type, 3 years, certified according to the law. 3. A person who holds a diploma of social work, certified according to the law. 4. A person who holds a diploma of social work issued or recognized in one of the states which are members of the European Union, other states of the European Economic Area or the Swiss Confederation.

After 1989, altogether with increasing level of the schooling and certification of social workers, it has been observed that the phenomenon of migration abroad of social workers has widened, at first on its own, and over time facilitated by professional recruiters. This phenomenon of emigration of social workers was observed to be directed towards several countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, etc., but presently emigration of social workers is particularly directed towards the United Kingdom. Thus, following a specific procedure, professional recruiters establish certain selection criteria, such as:

⁶ Maria Bulgaru and M Dilion, *Concepte fundamentale ale asisten ei sociale* (USM, Chi in u, 2000), 9.

⁷ Legea nr.466 din 2004 privind Statutul Asistentului Social.

International Migration of Qualified Human Resources in Social Assistance. Value Dimensions and Professional Dilemmas

higher education in the field of social work (at least a Bachelor degree), at least two years of experience in social assistance in the last five years of professional activity, availability to work in the United Kingdom for at least two years, knowledge of English at an advanced level and holding a driving license which is considered an advantage. If these conditions are met, social workers undergo an interview with specialists in social assistance in the United Kingdom. Moreover, professional recruiters often collaborate with institutions in Romania to identify more easily the people who are both skilled in the field of social work and willing to migrate to work abroad (e.g. National College of Social Workers, NGOs, public institutions, religious institutions).

An example of professional recruitment leader in the UK is *HCL Social Care*. It collaborates with Romanian social workers specializing in child protection and family support, assistance of juvenile delinquents, of people addicted to the use of various substances, people with physical or mental impairments, and other vulnerable groups. *HCL Social Care* requires that social workers should be enrolled in the National College of Social Workers and be signed in HCPC (the British equivalent of CNASR). The association provides assistance to all international candidates in the process of relocation to the UK, providing them with adequate information on transport, accommodation, documents required for inclusion in HCPC, etc.⁸

The procedure followed by social workers for leaving to work abroad includes the following steps: registration by sending a CV to a recruitment agency, validation of qualifications and experience in the field of social assistance, the study of documentation on social welfare and the laws of the UK, an interview with specialists from the UK in the field of social assistance, signing a contract and accepting the assigned job. The services offered for integration of social workers in England are: an assigned job, a competitive offer for salary and relocation packages, courses of English language, courses of professional training in the field of social assistance, transportation, accommodation information, guidance, company car (in some cases).

Case studies: "The integration and adaptation of social workers in the UK. Value dimensions and professional dilemmas"

To highlight the opportunities to emigrate in the UK as a social worker, as well as the risks and efforts employed to achieve this goal, a research was carried

⁸ [Http://www.hclsocialcare.com](http://www.hclsocialcare.com).

out which aimed at assessing the possibilities for integration and adaptation of the social workers who opted to work in England and their possible professional development. The research was based on a research method - the interview, which was applied to a significant number of emigrant social workers. For this article has been chosen three illustrative cases to be analyzed. One was successful, one with setbacks but with final achievements, and the third a failure. By means of their analysis we can notice that the people involved in these particular cases went through some changes and stages of assimilation and integration, with implications and changes in the know style of work, attitudes and perception towards life, values, both professionally and economically.

CASE 1 - "A GREAT SUCCESS!"

D. I. is a woman aged 39 years, a social worker who has been working in England for the past nine years. She has integrated quite well in the destination country. The first year was difficult, but she managed to improve her language skills and to adapt to the new professional requirements. She was successively promoted and currently works as an integrating service coordinator and lecturer at a prestigious university.

in the beginning it was not easy for me, but with work and perseverance I managed to get to coordinate services, to make decisions and to educate young people willing to do this profession. I think it is a chance for many of the social workers, for me it really was and is.

D. I. mentioned that in England it is not very hard to find another job in the field. One can be promoted and search for better paying jobs if he/she is concerned about occupational safety and has the desire for professional improvement.

This is not like in the in the home country, where you need to protect your job. If you are skilled you can easily go from one institution to another and seek increasingly better paid jobs. One starts from 1200 -1300 pounds per month, but this can increase to 3500-4000 pounds per month. The goal is to earn better, because you do the job anyway.

What Mrs. D. I. said was impressive, because it shows that in the UK social work is respected and known as a profession and social workers perform their work according to the principles and rules of professional conduct. Unfortunately in most countries, including Romania, social work is perceived distorted.

The best part is that here you just do your job and are respected for what you do. Social work in the UK is very well organized and regulated. Unfortunately it is not the same in the country of origin, where not everybody seems to know clearly what social work involves, and where social workers are still confused with nurses, orderlies,

International Migration of Qualified Human Resources in Social Assistance. Value Dimensions and Professional Dilemmas

personal assistants. Unfortunately there are other countries where the same perception dominates.

When asked whether she would want to return in the home country, D. I. specified that there's nothing to return to, because she managed to meet her aims and to develop professionally in the UK.

What does the home country give me, so that I should go back? Nothing. Here I bought a house, I bought what I wanted, here I managed to see the world, I was able to have any holiday I dreamed of, I am respected as a professional here. In the home country, a social worker salary is barely enough to survive with. It's the minimum wage, which is shameful. For now I would not return.

CASE 2 - "I DID NOT GIVE UP."

The social worker S.R., a woman aged 37, who lives in the UK with her husband for three years. She found very difficult even to find a job in England, according to her personal experience in the field achieved before leaving the home country. The reason for leaving was the lack of financial resources. "I left the country because my husband and I were no longer able to live on the salaries we have in the home country. But it was very hard for me before I left because I did not know much English and I did not want to accept any kind of job there."

There are situations where to be accepted to work as a social worker is more difficult. In this case the person who applied for the job was only accepted the third time.

I was rejected at the first interview; I was even in the UK to give an interview. I was about to give up, but I managed to move on. Basically at the third interview I was accepted for a job that I wanted. It was not quite easy, for some people it is much easier.

S.R. encountered some difficulties in the country of migration such as language, the differences in the laws and methods applied, and in the work style.

First, I found it very hard to handle the language and the work style, which are different from the home country. In addition, I had to learn a lot of methods and techniques, legislation, work strategies because they have a different style of working which, I admit, is more accurate and effective.

Once integrated in the country of migration, S.R. is satisfied with what she has been offered, feeling motivated and valued. She believes that if the home country does not motivated young people to stay, they will further migrate and this will be an important loss for the country.

I'm not sorry that I got here. I feel increasingly motivated and valued. There are drawbacks as anywhere, but it's something else. For now I'm not going to return home.

Unfortunately if we consider the rate at which Romania motivates young graduates in the field of social assistance, they will leave the country. And destination countries such as the UK benefit from young people schooled in the home country.

CASE 3 - "IT WAS A FAILURE"

The social worker, R.I. a woman aged 41, has lived in England for two years. She worked in an organization handling with the incoming emergency calls. It was not what she had dreamed of and it was strenuous for her. She was not paid well and, as a result, together with her husband she decided to return home.

Although I really wanted to go abroad for work, for me this was a failure. I think one also needs to have a bit of luck. I was assigned to an organization that handled with incoming emergency calls. After a short time I felt exhausted and felt that this was not what I have wanted.

R.I. considers that it is important how applicants are distributed and which the real chance offered abroad is. In her case it was more difficult, and as a result she decided to return home.

Maybe if I had another job in the field and also better paid, I would have chosen not to return to my home country, but maybe it was not meant to be. Life was too tough and strenuous for me.

In *conclusion*, migration of social workers is based on the one hand on a certain desire to improve their lifestyle – improved quality of life, and on the other hand on the recognition, development and professional mobility. To practice their job in the UK, social workers follow a well-established route and demonstrate that they fulfill certain criteria pursued by professional recruiters, starting with an advanced level of English, holding diplomas certifying completion of studies in the field, to the willingness to work in England for at least two years. Once in the country of migration, social workers are assigned to a workplace and supported by the same recruitment leaders; as a result, they benefit from certain services aimed to help them to integrate in the destination country and at the new work place.

In the present paper we analyzed three cases highlighting the difficulties faced by immigrant social workers, and the benefits they may enjoy. The development of the immigration process is noteworthy and also the changes occurring with the integration in the destination country: changes in personal and social identity, in the professional perspectives, in self-perception and self-esteem, in mentality, perception, values, in social and professional mobility, in lifestyle.

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International Migration of Qualified Human Resources in Social Assistance. Value Dimensions and Professional Dilemmas

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