

**Recent Challenges in Hungary:
Economic Inequalities and Labour Shortage
from the Perspective of Labour Unionists**

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Zusammenfassung

Der Beitrag diskutiert den Zusammenhang zwischen Arbeitskräftemangel und wirtschaftlicher Ungleichheit in Ungarn (vor der Covid19-Krise), aus der Perspektive ungarischer GewerkschafterInnen. Das Hauptaugenmerk dieser Forschung liegt darauf zu verstehen, wie die Entwicklung des ungarischen Arbeitsmarktes zur Abwanderung von Arbeitskräften und zum Arbeitskräftemangel führte. Dabei werden die spezifischen historischen, geografischen und politischen Aspekte Ungarns im Kontext der mittel- und osteuropäischen Region berücksichtigt. Diese Arbeit erweitert die bestehende Forschung betreffend Emigration und Arbeitskräftemangel, da sie Erfahrungen von GewerkschaftsvertreterInnen einarbeitet, basierend auf 17 semistrukturierten problemzentrierten Interviews. Aus dieser Studie geht hervor, dass niedrige Löhne die soziale Anerkennung traditioneller Berufe und qualifizierter Arbeitskräfte vermindern. Aufgrund der zunehmenden Arbeitsbelastung, die die Grenzen des Privatlebens überschreitet, entwickeln Erwerbstätige die Strategie, entweder ins Ausland oder in wohlhabendere Regionen Ungarns umzusiedeln, um weniger erschöpfende und besser bezahlte Tätigkeiten auszuüben. Dies führt zu wachsender Arbeitskräftefluktuations und Mangel an professionellen Arbeitskräften. Die Studie identifiziert außerdem, wie regionale Ungleichheiten die Migrationsmöglichkeiten der Menschen beeinflussen und stellt fest, dass Menschen aus ärmeren östlichen Regionen Ungarns zunächst in Grenzgebiete ziehen, die sie dann als Sprungbrett nutzen, um bessere Chancen in Westeuropa wahrzunehmen.

Abstract

This paper analyses the relationship between labour shortage and economic inequalities within Hungary (before the Covid-19 Crisis) from the perspective of labour unions. The main focus of this research is to understand how Hungarian labour market developments led to the emigration of labour force and the labour shortage that developed considering the specific historical, geographical and political characteristics of Hungary within the Central and Eastern European region. This paper extends the existing research about emigration and labour shortage as it includes labour union representatives' experience based on 17 semi-structured problem-centred interviews. This study concludes that meagre wages hinder the social recognition of traditional professions and skilled labour force. As a result, the labour force develops its strategy of changing professions to less demanding activities either moving abroad or to wealthier regions of Hungary due to the increasing workload that infiltrates private life. This results in growing job fluctuation and the lack of professional labour force. The study furthermore identifies how regional inequalities influence people's migration opportunities and finds that people from Hungary's poorer Eastern regions firstly relocate to border areas which then they use as a springboard to find better opportunities in Western Europe.

Keywords

Auswanderung, Arbeitskräftemangel, Gewerkschaften, Niedrige Löhne, Regionale Ungleichheit

Keywords English

Emigration, Labour shortage, Labour Unions, Meagre Wages, Regional Inequalities

Introduction

This paper analyses labour shortage and economic inequalities¹ within the Hungarian employment structure from the perspective of labour unionists². I had done my research before the Covid-19 Crisis, consequently it is not mentioned or discussed in my study.

Labour shortage is a well-known phenomenon in all Central European countries, and it is often discussed in the context of the exodus of skilled and highly educated labour force. Outward migration from Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs) drastically intensified when these countries joined the European Union. Emigration towards Western Europe resulted in the 5% loss of Central and Eastern Europe's total population since 1990 (Black et al. 2010, Hárs 2016, portfolio 2016).

In Hungary, labour shortage has become an issue in 2015. According to official statistics, in 2018, 80 000 people were missing from the Hungarian labour market. 60 000 people were missing merely from the private sector, demonstrating an approximately 30% increase of missing people compared to the previous year. However, the actual number of the total required labour force might be 350 000 in construction, catering and tourism industries, public administration, trade and carrier services, and manufacturing industry. The number of people solely missing from the manufacturing industry might be 200 000 (KSH 2018, portfolio 2017 & 2018). The problem is not only economic; there are growing tensions in Hungary in the political arena and public opinion against Hungarians who went abroad and have income from Western-European countries; the public tongue often measures Hungarian wages to Western wages. Wages are held to be the lowest in the health and social care sector and tourism and catering industries. Labour shortage is a problem in all sectors and a real threat for the Hungarian business expansion and economic development as empty vacancies are often filled by low-skilled workers threatening the quality of production (Atoyán et al. 2016, Fazekas/Köllő 2016, Pogátsa/Fábry 2019, portfolio 2017 & 2018).

¹ "Economic inequality is the unequal distribution of income and opportunity between different groups in society" (IZA - <https://wol.iza.org/key-topics/economic-inequality>)

² I would like to thank my adviser Prof. Dr. Roland Verwiebe for all his support and guidance that he provided me throughout the work on this paper.

This study extends the research about emigration and labour shortage by including labour union's point of view about the Hungarian labour shortage and investigates the reasons why there is a serious labour shortage in the Hungarian labour market. To answer this question I had conducted 17 semi-structured interviews with Hungarian labour union expert officials and I had asked them about the challenges that labour unions and labour force face in the employment structure that often results in labour leaving its jobs. The reason for asking labour unions is because they function as intermediaries between labour force and employers and thus, they are well informed about the labour market changes including governmental decisions that influence them. Also, they have personal contact with the labour force. Hungarian labour unions often feel that they are losing power since the transition. During socialism, they fulfilled important social tasks but after the privatisation processes and since then, according to their narrative, they have an undervalued political and economic position and face hardship to counteract economic interests that can have harmful effects when it comes to bargaining.

This article is divided into four sections. The complexity of the issue and its strong social impact demands the extension of a solely economic framework. Therefore, this study expands the theoretical framework of traditional labour economics by alternative approaches like geo-economics and dependent capitalist development, taking into consideration the specific historical and political characteristics of Hungary within the Central and Eastern European region. In a relation with this, the second section discusses patterns of migration from the CEECs. In the third section, research methodology is presented. Based on the research results, it will be demonstrated how labour unions can identify labour shortages. According to their explanations, labour shortage is due to the emigration and fluctuation of qualified labour force. Then, based on their explanation, it will be outlined what the reasons are for labour force's emigration and fluctuation.

Theoretical Starting Point

Labour Shortage

Based on the fundamental principle of classical economics, labour shortage is the result of disequilibrium of supply and demand on the labour market, a shortfall in the total number of individuals in the labour force (Barnow et al. 2013:4, Grabowska-Lusińska 2010,

Greenwood 2016). The literature differentiates between external skills shortages when labour cannot be recruited due to a demand for skills that is not available in the external labour market (outside of a company's own organization); and between internal skill shortages (within a company/organization) when the available workforce or newly hired employees lack the necessary abilities and knowledge that is required by employers (Marchante et al. 2005, cited Bosworth/Warren 1992).

In addition, this research proposes that *"it is important to go beyond the economic definition of shortage"* to consider the human side of the economy (Barnow et al. 2013:6). Barnow et al. therefore suggests measuring labour shortages by qualitative factors such as employers' recruiting efforts (Barnow et al. 2013:5).

The labour market is a sub-level of national economies and is strongly embedded in international markets, hence external factors define national labour market developments (Borjas 2013, Healy et al. 2011, Köllő et al. 2017, Zerche 2000). Accordingly, economic developments must be analysed in a country's historic and political context.

Migration Theories

Ernest Ravenstein gave the basis for modern migration theory by arguing that migration was governed by push and pull factors. According to this, migrants' decision to migrate depends on better conditions at external locations³. Later, this theory was extended by Everett Lee who gave more emphasis to internal factors (push) and the impact of intervening obstacles⁴. The new perspective integrated one's social networks, social, familial, and cultural context when analysing their decision to migrate.

The main theories in understanding international patterns of migration are the following (Bertram et al. 2014, Massey 1999): *Neoclassical theory* assumed that international migration is related to global supply and demand for labour⁵. The *world-system theory* outlines that migration was developed and adopted by centre regions (core capitalist) to overcome high skilled worker shortage at their home country by recruiting professionals from the periphery (Papadopoulos 2012, Seers 1979, Török 2017). This often results in

³ <https://family.jrank.org/pages/1170/Migration-Theories-Migration.html>

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/sites/jrcsh/files/theoriesofmigration2.pdf>

brain drain, the permanent emigration of highly skilled manpower from poor to rich countries (Wolburg 2001). The *dual labour market* theory defines the need for cheap workers in developing countries as the main reason for migration independently from the labour or wage conditions at the origin societies; there are huge differences in wages between the primary and secondary segments of the labour market (Dickens/Lang 1992, Wiesböck et al. 2016).

Globalization facilitates the establishment of transnational markets and processes of emigration in a way that migrants can get integrated into the destination country without renouncing their feeling of belonging to their homeland. Hence, movement of people does not necessarily result in their settlement; one might move *"back and forth between sending and receiving countries"* meanwhile realising better job opportunities, higher income returns and social mobility (Geddes/Scholten 2016:6). People's movement e.g. can be institutionally driven, or it might be arbitrary or time-specific – short or long-term - decision (Verwiebe et al. 2017).

Migration is strongly influenced by regional discrepancies, differences in life chances in terms of demographic, economic, political, and ecological factors, and the welfare gap between the sending and the receiving country. Migration highly depends on the migrant's opportunities, its financial situation, and the existence of helping networks (Siskáné et al. 2017).

Transition to the Capitalist System and Weak Labour Market

In Hungary, during the state socialist system, the term of *"labour shortage"* was propagated as an immanent feature of the socialist era because in the paternalistic socialist economy, the softening of corporate budget constraints led to the emergence of a resource hungry economy and over demand for labour that was believed to disappear after the change to the capitalist system (Boswell/Straubhaar 2004, Köllő et al. 2017 cited Kornai 1980). However, the ripple effect of globalisation in the ex-socialist countries created distorted versions of capitalism and premature welfare states on the periphery of Europe (Bohle/Greskovits 2012, Delteil/Kirov 2016, Enyedi 2005, Éber et al. 2014, Gerőcs/Pinkasz 2019).

In the 1990s, crony capitalism and economic oligarchs' expansion⁶ was typical for the region (Becker et al. 2016, Éber et al. 2014, Enyedi 2005). Economic development was believed to be achieved through foreign investments (Becker et al. 2016, Bohle/Greskovits 2012, Gal/Smith 2017). The free flow of capital resulted often that low value added production were shifted to the CEECs: *"Given that the national industry inherited from the state socialist period was dismantled through the privatisation process only to be recast as predominantly foreign-owned and assembly plant type and given the endemic unavailability of indigenous capital for domestic industry, the highest value-added operations in industrial production in the Hungarian economy are controlled by foreign capital"* (Böröcz 2012:25). As a result, Dale and Fábry argue that flexible labour laws, low taxation on capital and laws aimed to ensure the protection of private property and the right to expatriate profits (Dale/Fábry 2018:14). Similarly, wages and taxes were shaped in favour of investors to attract FDI into the region (Böröcz 2012, Galgóczi 2017, Myant 2016). In addition to the statements of Böröcz, Dale and Fábry, Galgóczi states: *"wage developments in central and eastern Europe (CEE) over the past twenty years (...) shows that wages are not only low compared to western Europe but, (...) also tend to be lower than what the economic potential of these countries would allow for"* (Galgóczi 2017:4).

To smoothen the emergence of international capital and the integration of the CEE region into international markets, industrial relations were first developed by multinationals taking over the position of large socialist enterprises. As such, the transformation process also meant the curtailment of labour unions' rights: *"one of the principal tasks of the transition to capitalism has been to break the resistance of the working class"* (Bafoil 2016:25).

In 1989, the first independent labour unions emerged after the liquidation of the Hungarian National Council of Trade Unions (SZOT), giving the basis for a multi-unionist trade union structure. However, the transition into a parliamentary democracy and a market economy forced labour unions to organize themselves based on top down regulations and reforms (Girndt 2013). The economic changes during the transition and the 1992 Labour Code resulted in the union's weak bargaining position. The expanding small and middle

⁶ Oligarchy means a small group of people having control of a country or organization. An oligarch is a ruler in an oligarchy (source: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/oligarch>)

scale enterprises sector and a large proportion of undeclared work has led to unions losing their members (Lux 2008, Neumann 2018).

Currently, low wages and unsatisfactory working conditions are held to be main factors influencing people's willingness to migrate and as such they contribute to labour shortage. Because of the weak bargaining position of labour unions, neither can they counter-influence negative labour market developments, nor can they "stop" the labour force from leaving its workplaces. Accordingly, labour unions are a key point in understanding the labour market shortage of Hungary.

Migratory Movements in Hungary within the CEE Context

Emigration from Eastern to Western Europe and free movement of people became the motor of transition, and as such showed the shift from soviet type economic planning towards capitalist markets (Blaskó et al. 2016, Carmel/Cerami, 2011, Geddes 2016, Haller/Verwiebe 2016, Papadopoulos 2012). Yet, because of high unemployment rates, insecure working conditions and social and economic inequalities, the integration of the CEECs into the world economy resulted in *"the emergence of various regional 'growth poles' of the economy. These economic differences were amplified by diversity in the pace and course of transition strategies adopted by individual CEE countries and the accompanying political conditions. All this strongly influenced the movements of CEE populations and ultimately led to a new migration space in the region"* (Black et al. 2010:8-9).

Furthermore, the lack of structural change and decreasing intergenerational mobility in many of the post-socialist countries led to high levels of immobility (Eurofound 2017, Mau/Verwiebe 2010, OECD 2018). Lower grade of social mobility results in growing dissatisfaction in society and can be the cause of migration of labour force.

Outward migration intensified even more after the accession of many CEECs to the EU and after the 2008 economic crisis (Engbersen/Jansen 2013, Schellinger 2015, Schreiner 2008). Since the beginning of the crisis, most of the Central and Eastern European countries were strongly affected by high unemployment, especially Bulgaria and Romania and the Baltic countries that resulted in growing numbers of migrants. Poland is well known to be an emigration country but due to its stable GDP ratio re-emigration was also significant. Despite emigration increased from Slovakia after its accession to the EU, backward

migration also accelerated after the economic crisis (Andrén/Roman 2014, Engbersen/Jansen 2013 Grabowska-Lusińska 2010, Horváth/Kiss 2016, Kaczmarczyk 2014, Kaczmarczyk/Okólski 2005, Roman et al. 2010).

Hungarian emigration was insignificant directly after the accession to the EU but showed a continuous increase after the 2008/2009 economic crisis. Primary destinations are Austria, Germany, and the United Kingdom (data in 2016). Short-term migration and cross-border commuting have become popular from Budapest, Western Transdanubia and Northern Great plain regions (Fazekas/Köllő 2016, Sik/Szeitl 2016). The number of Hungarian citizens, currently living and working abroad, who have emigrated since 1989 is estimated to be between 350,000 and 600,000 (Siskáné et al. 2017) The proportion of 26-50 year old migrants is the highest, yet, the most significant group of migrants is young people in their twenties and thirties without family (Blaskó et al. 2014). The number of emigrants with a low educational background are few, the number of migrants with higher qualifications are high and overrepresented compared to their number in Hungary (Hárs 2016, Pogátsa 2015a, Sik/Szeitl 2016). The higher rate of younger people's emigration is explained by the uncertainty about the future, growing dissatisfaction with the education policy and the social welfare system (Ágh 2018, Csanádi et al. 2014, Farkas 2007, Siskáné et al. 2017, Tóth et al. 2012).

Migration patterns show similarities in all Central and Eastern European countries after their accession to the European Union. The outflow of labour migrants reached an unprecedented scale by 2015, implying that Central and Eastern Europe became the largest exporter of labour force within the EU and therefore, emigration is held to be the main cause of labour shortage in the region (Black et al. 2010, Duszczyk/Matuszczyk 2015, Hárs 2016, Iglicka/Ziółek-Skrzypczak 2010, Kaczmarczyk/Okólski 2005, Roman et al. 2010).

Research Method

17 problem-centred semi-structured expert interviews are the primary source of this research that were conducted with labour union representatives between November 2017 and January 2018 in Budapest. Labour union representatives were recruited by the snow-ball sampling after having contacted one labour union chairman at Budapest.

Although labour shortage is originally an economic phenomenon, this research aimed to get a new insight into the current situation by considering it as a more complex sociohistorical, and political issue. The identity of the interviewees is kept anonymous based on below table.

Interview Partners				
Age Groups (AG): 1 (30-40), 2 (40-50), 3 (50-60), 4 (60 and older)				
Number	Name*	Industry	Gender	AG
1	Jonathan	Union Expert	Male	4
2	Amanda	Law Expert	Female	4
3	Timothy	Union Expert	Male	1
4	Linda	Tourism	Female	4
5	Dylan	Health Care	Male	3
6	Louisa	Packaging	Female	3
7	Nicholas	Metal	Male	2
8	Sara	Public Service	Female	3
9	Julia	Pharmaceutical	Female	2
10	Joseph	Fertilizer	Male	3
11	Harry	Firefighter	Male	3
12	David	Federation	Male	4
13	George	Federation	Male	2
14	Kate	Pharmaceutical	Female	3
15	Francis	Poultry	Female	4
16	Wilhelm	Food	Male	3
17	Jack	Gas	Male	2
*Pseudonyms were used to keep the anonymity of the interview partners.				

14 interviews were conducted with Hungarian trade unionists both from the private and public sector such as the pharmaceutical industry, public service, poultry industry, packaging industry, food industry, social service, fertilizer industry, firefighters, and metal industry. Before these, 3 preliminary interviews were made with labour union experts to underline the main questions for the research and to formulate semi-structured interview questions. An interview guide was developed to compare similar statements of the interview partners (Aulls 2004, Kohlbacher 2006, Larcher 2010). All interviews were recorded and completely transcribed in Hungarian, then translated into English. The interviews have been thematised and evaluated by using the thematic content analysis (Biddix 2009, Mayring 2000). The standpoint of interview partners has been integrated into the analysis by taking care of the reproduction and retelling of their opinions, judgements, observations, and interpretations (Denzin/Lincoln 2000, Meuser/Nagel 1991). This includes relevant information about how the Hungarian labour market developed reflecting on politico-economic changes such as the transformation in 1989, the accession to the EU in 2004 and governmental change in 2010.

Research Results

Labour unions can detect labour market mismatches from the decreasing number of labour union members or labour signing new applications after switching their workplaces. Unions receive many requests from desperate employers who can foresee that they will soon run out of labour and ask labour unions to help them find people. Jonathan, who is a labour union expert, explained about one of their very dramatic moments when *„from one of our companies they called us whether we could find 300 people immediately because they could employ them, and they would like to increase production. Well, we couldn't (said laughter)“*. Unionists believe that the current situation is partially the result of bad employment policy: *„As a governmental representative once said: we will always find a labour force for the guaranteed minimum wage that will be able to learn the job. It was maybe one year ago, but he already proved to be wrong [...] Because what they do not consider is that when they say that there is unskilled or low-skilled labour force in the country, yes, there is, they are right, but surely not for jobs that require dedication and devotion“* - said Dylan (healthcare).

Unionists explained that the first signs of the developing labour shortage were noticed in 2014. By 2018 the situation extremely escalated because of the lack of qualified labour force: *"young people cannot acquire the same knowledge as those who learned 20-25 years ago. So, we had an outstanding vocational program before, to which the new vocational school system cannot be compared in the absence of professional knowledge"* - said Joseph (fertilizer). Labour union experts highlighted that this is especially harmful in the public services sector and manufacturing industry since manpower is an almost exclusive work tool but finding adequate labour force is almost impossible. To replace the missing labour force, internal employees must deal with the increasing workload: *"The only solution is overtime work. Our employees work 12 hours instead of 8, and they even work on the weekends either on Saturday or Sunday"* - said Kate (pharmaceutical). Despite the labour shortage forcing a rise of the minimum wage by 25%, it had a harmful effect by squeezing wages from below: *"First, we believed that the last year would bring positive changes when the minimum wage was raised to approximately 600 Euros from 1st of January, but instead it decompressed the salary structure. It squeezed the wages from below, so wage differences disappeared and almost everybody is employed for the minimum wage"* - said Wilhelm (food). Wilhelm explained that the increased minimum wage only benefited those who newly entered the labour market forgetting about long-term employees. Francis (poultry) commented on the situation by adding: *"people get so nervous and physically exhausted, that they rather go on sick leave accepting to receive only 60% of their salary"*. Therefore, we can conclude that the labour shortage that developed is putting growing pressure on the available labour that becomes physically exhausted and collapses under dire employment conditions. The increasing responsibility and burdensome tasks of employees dramatically accelerated the fluctuation and emigration of workers.

Since the peak of the labour shortage, unionists noticed changes in employers' behaviour, demonstrating that employers are having a hard time finding sufficient labour force. For example, they try to attract the labour force by indicating salaries in job advertisements: *"it gains more and more importance as employers noticed that employees are ready to change their workplace if they see that they would be rewarded more in another place including both cafeteria benefits and salary"* - said Timothy (union expert). In extreme

cases, employers are willing to use extra official channels to find the necessary labour force. Louisa (packaging) told for example that "*there was a kind of recruitment too [...] that our workers bring here another person to work [...], and they were rewarded with 150 or 300 Euros. [...] This is much cheaper than hiring a head-hunter company*". It could be said that not only is the labour force exploited by increasing workload and unfair wages, employers also raise their responsibilities through extra official channels.

Considering the definitions of labour shortage given by Barnow et al. 2013 and Marchante et al. 2005, Hungarian labour shortage can be well explained by both external and internal skill shortages. Based on the explanations of unionists, we can suggest that neither can the necessary labour force be recruited from the labour market due to their lack of qualification, nor can the newly hired employees work autonomously and take over their predecessor's job. Furthermore, the changes in employer's behaviour and recruiting efforts demonstrates the seriousness of the issue.

In the following sections, main problems causing labour shortage considered by labour unionists will be outlined: 1., Insufficient Wages and Unpredictable Working Conditions (the Curtailment of Employees' Rights and Labour Unions' Bargaining Power), 2., Regional Disparities and Mobility Chances, and 3., Modern and Post-Modern Industrial Relations and the Disappearance of Traditional Jobs.

Insufficient Wages and Unpredictable Working Conditions

Almost all the unionists mentioned that the main reasons for emigration and fluctuation are low wages and poor employment conditions. Unionists highlighted that employment protection deteriorated as collective work agreements have been lifted, atypical forms of employment emerged, and more risks were shifted to the employees, especially after the 2008 economic crisis. To palliate its consequences, a new Labour Code has been issued in 2012 that labour unions often refer to as the „*Employers Code*” since, according to them, it overtly favours employers' rights over employees. Unionists said that unaccountability in decision-making processes is also safeguarded by the retroactive effect of laws.

Unionists explained that the importance of wages in maintaining the labour force is especially conspicuous if considered over time. In tourism e.g.: "*people have to work the same*

much as 50 years ago, still their salary is not considerably higher” - said Linda (tourism), or in the metal sector, “When I started to work in this company people received 50% more than the average salary in the town so people were proud to work here, but today there is no difference at all” - told Nicholas . Even now, when labour markets are tight, employers are unwilling to pay higher salaries: “[...] employers still dare not to pay the last salary of the workers [...] excusing themselves with other expenses [...]. So, we could say that employers did not change their attitude about wages in the last 10 years since the economic crisis rolled in [...] they still believe that labour shortage will not last long, so they do not reach into their pockets as much as they should” - added Linda (tourism). Unionists highlighted that despite the current labour market situation and growing threat on production processes, a profit-oriented attitude is still dominant.

As a result, labour unionists highlighted that cross-border commuting has become one of the most common strategies to overcome the financial difficulties resulting from low wages and the growing pressure in the employment structure: *“In Szombathely, a service commander, the deputy, and two subordinate colleagues found a job about 30-40 km from Szombathely where they earn twice as much as in Hungary. So, they sit in the car, go and return, commuting every day, but still worth it, zero responsibility. Their employer refunds even their travel expenses. They told me: So, what else do you need? No stress, no choking, no constant control” - mentioned Harry (firefighter). Unionists mentioned that people are willing to change their jobs already for 30-70-euro differences, even after “20 years of employment relation despite their entitlement for severance pay secured by collective bargaining, because they cannot cope with growing pressure and working requirements from their superiors” - explained Francis (poultry). In some extreme cases, where the dissatisfaction of workers is so high, they support each other to find new working places together. Because of the unsatisfying working conditions in Hungary, people are ready to take over jobs abroad that they are overqualified for and require from them a downward movement compared to their previous social status in the home country. Harry (firefighter) mentioned that „[...] a whole traffic police department demobilised [...] from a county's main captaincy because one of them found a new job opportunity for all of them. They did not have to do anything special but wash containers at plant protection machines. Moreover, then they said how much they earned, and everyone from the head department to the*

sergeant could say about himself that he earns two or three times more [...] and these were skilled workers not people with primary school education".

Downward social mobility movements can also be observed within the national market. Based on the explanations of unionists, it could be concluded that not all the workers have the necessary cultural and financial capital to move abroad. These people are often forced to work in professions which they do not find personally satisfying, or that would correspond to their qualification, but they need to improve their earnings. This also affects people who work with a call but are forced to give up on their job because of the poor wages and bad employment circumstances: *"Social workers first go to the healthcare sector if they also have healthcare qualifications. However, the real threat is if they go to work at Tesco or Auchan. And they do, even after 20 years of employment. For example, a highly respected care worker from the area of Győr found a job in the industrial park of Audi"* - explained Dylan (health care). Thus, changing professions became a new strategy especially in those jobs where work assignments require a lot of sacrifices not only in their profession but also in their private life: *"working on the production line is more comfortable and unlikely to the nursing home it is family-friendly with a significantly higher salary"* - added Dylan.

Even though we could notice that employers changed their behaviour in terms of recruiting processes, they do not correspondingly change their attitude regarding wages as it would be required to maintain the labour force, according to unionists. Low wages seem to be an inseparable feature of the private sector that is highly dominated by foreign capital and because of this reason labour market conditions are adjusted to capitalists' interest (Böröcz 2012, Galgóczi 2017). Interviewees highlighted that the lack of structural reforms, institutional instability and the lack of transparency has created a very unstable environment for the labour force. Labour force can defend itself from the unstable labour market conditions either by fluctuating - going from one workplace to another within the national labour market- or emigrating abroad. Based on the explanations of unionists, we can understand that migratory movements of Hungarian workers are influenced by the better conditions abroad (push and pull factors). The direction of migration is towards Western countries that offer better wages and employment conditions (world-system

theory) and because of that workers are ready to take jobs that they are overqualified for (dual labour market).

Regional Disparities

Probably one of the biggest contradictions of the current situation is that besides the labour shortage there is a high unemployment rate as well. According to unionists, the reason for that is vast differences between the quality of life and employment conditions in the cities and in the countryside. Hence, labour shortage is more noticeable in central areas, while in peripheral areas, mainly in Eastern Hungary, supply of labour is much higher than the demand of labour. Interviewees highlighted that people from non-urban areas struggle with existential problems in the everyday, *"people are afraid, even those who are employed are afraid of losing their jobs, their means of subsistence. There are available jobs, mostly in the capital, but not in the countryside. People do not know where they can find a job meanwhile, they must maintain their family [...]. Moreover, and despite this, there is labour shortage"* - explained Francis (poultry). According to their experiences, in extreme cases, if the costs of transportation or rents are disproportionately higher compared to their salary, the labour force rather refuses to accept jobs. Because of the infrastructural burden and oversupply of workers, people became more willing to move abroad from Eastern regions: *"Everybody who had the ability to work, already went abroad"* - said Dylan (health care). Louisa (packaging) also mentioned that the problem is not new, she clearly remembers when two of her ex-colleagues left the city of Nyíregyháza 20 years ago because the situation was already so bad at that time. Harry (firefighter) mentioned that it is not rare that labour unions receive requests from workers to help them get better working opportunities in other parts of the country because of the huge inequalities between Eastern and Western regions of Hungary. He also added that, in the Western part of Hungary, this often results in emigration because of the close distance of Western European countries at border areas: *"In general, the situation in Eastern regions is so bad that many people ask for help to get away from those areas once they notice the difference in other regions. I talked with many colleagues and even tried to help them to get from Nyíregyháza or Borsod or Hajdú to Győr or Sopron or Szombathely or Zalaegerszeg or other Western and Central regions. However, many who once reached Sopron or other border areas also start to work illegally in Austria for example twice a week and then*

slowly, they quit". Accordingly, we can understand that the labour force first tries to overcome their disadvantaged situation by moving from Eastern to Western regions of Hungary. Then, after having relocated to border areas they use it as a springboard to find better opportunities in Western Europe.

Interviewees' explanations about regional inequalities influencing job opportunities corresponds to the findings of the 2017 Eurofound Report. Pervasive regional differences including inadequate infrastructure, bad transportation and property relations majorly influence employment conditions: *"The disparity between the more advantaged western regions and the eastern parts of Hungary is long-standing; it is reflected both in economic development and in differences in life expectancy. The relative disadvantage of eastern regions is also apparent in other central European countries such as Poland and Slovakia, where inadequate transport infrastructure is highlighted as an issue"* (Eurofound 2017:46). Research results let us also suggest that employees or unemployed facing the stigmatization of being poor in the Eastern regions of the country often find emigration to Western Europe as a solution against impoverishment.

Industrial Relations and the Disappearance of Traditional Jobs

Routine occupations or lower sales and service occupations were typical in Hungary during socialism. However, traditional training programs were abolished following the transition when state-owned companies became privatized and as a result about 1,5 million people lost their jobs. Simultaneously, multinational companies stopped providing training education to their workers when they abolished their workshops bringing an end to the tight contact between professionals and students that granted knowledge transfer between generations. Because of the arising insecurities around vocational jobs and their poor remuneration, the participation of students in the educational system drastically shifted from vocational training to a more general education and to higher education.

As a result, blue-collar (manufacturing industry and occupational jobs) jobs are now typically undervalued and underpaid: *"there were no salary development or benefits for years. Very simply, in order to keep the firm balance at the company, those extra benefits had to be completely suppressed, exactly what made this profession attractive for us [...] decreasing salaries or even physical aggression by the population were experienced as a moral*

attack against this industry” - told Jack (gas). The decreasing appreciation of occupational jobs also strongly influences the survival of traditional family businesses that went from generation to generation. Francis (poultry) explained that it was very natural that the whole family worked in the same production. Considering that these jobs became mentally and also physically more demanding but not compensated accordingly results that many people give upon these jobs: “even fathers who have been working in the profession over years, discourage their own children to choose the same path based on their own bad experiences” - told Jack (gas). We can identify that the people who refuse to continue the path of their parents leave a gap behind themselves in the demand for a qualified labour force.

Low salaries are also very typical for the SMB sector (small and medium-sized business). They often struggle with the lack of financial basis therefore, they need to find alternative solutions to be able to run the business at a lower cost: *“employers often try to reshape the labour law and employ black-and-grey to avoid paying the officially raised minimum wage. So, they rewrite the employment contract to 4 hours while, the worker is employed in 12 hours. “Payments under the table” will not be counted in his pension or sickness leave, so he was working for nothing during many years”- said Linda (tourism) and explained that by registering the employee at a lower wage automatically reduces the expenses of the employer for their social security and pension. Francis (poultry) also explained that the current employment system does not protect employees against employers’ arbitrariness partially because of the high costs and contributions of employers which can often result in black employment: “since no one would supervise it, or even if there is an inspector who would notice that something was not performed, there are no sanctions. Employers ignore regulations. For example, a skilled worker should be paid the guaranteed wage minimum, thus 600 Euros. But it is easier to pay approx. 460 Euros, so they declassify him to a position where they can pay him less”.*

Low wages and insecure employment conditions often result in employees seeing migration as the only solution. For example, Julia (pharmaceutical) explained: *“[...] before, in the old mentality, people kept saying to themselves that staying at the old workplace is good for them: they had their salaries, stable work and so on, but some years ago the world opened up”.* According to the unionists, employees are more conscious and well

informed and can easily reflect on its situation by comparing their chances in Western Europe which accelerates their willingness to move abroad especially if they are well educated or have talent: *“unpredictable working conditions obviously scare professionals away, especially those talented ones, who speak at least one foreign language. They just “sprint” abroad”* - told Louisa (packaging).

Modernisation and post-modernisation in post-socialist countries dramatically influenced the employment of agricultural and blue-collar workers. The transition from socialist to capitalist markets resulted that large socialist enterprises were dissolved and the agricultural and manufacturing sectors were degraded that brought a sharp decrease in blue-collar jobs and led to negative restructuring on the labour market (Bohle/Greskovits 2012, Dale/Fábry 2018, Gal/Smith 2017). Because of the lack of financial capital of the newly privatized enterprises and start-ups, a dual education system based on the German model could not have been established (Farkas 2007). Instead, the so called OKJ system⁷ started its operation that led to the decrement of quality education and the decreasing number of students in vocational programs (Csanádi et al. 2014). Because of the undervalued perception of jobs, their poor remuneration and deteriorating employment conditions often result in employee's leaving their job and migrating to Western Europe.

Even though it was not the main focus of this paper, it needs to be added to this discussion, that Hungary's semi-peripheral position in the international division of labour has a huge impact on Hungarian labour market developments. In a relation with this, it could be said that the employment structure was tailored to the interest of capital influenced by Hungary's semi-peripheral position and the asymmetric relationship between Eastern and Western European countries, ignoring employees' demands for better wages and working conditions, manifested in the new Labour Code of 2012, i.e. in its changes in 2018 and in the restructuring of educational and vocational system (Bafoil 2016, Bohle/Greskovits 2012, Delteil/Kirov 2016, Gál/Schmidt 2017, Gerócs/Pinkasz 2019, Pogátsa 2015).

⁷ OKJ is the abbreviation for the Hungarian National Training Register (Országos Képzési Jegyzék) that has defined school-based vocational training and the range of vocational qualifications. OKJ stops its operations in 2020.

Discussion

This research undertook to analyse the correlation between Hungarian labour shortage and emigration. The research identified labour market deficiencies and regional inequalities to be the main reasons for people's migration. In addition to that the research found that Hungary's semi peripheral position in the international division of labour hinders positive labour market development and contributes to people's migratory willingness.

Meagre wages further hinder the social recognition of traditional professions and skilled labour force. As a result, based on the interviews, we can see that the labour force developed its strategy of changing professions to less-demanding activities due to the increasing workload that infiltrates private life, resulting in growing job fluctuation and lack of professional labour force.

The study furthermore identified how regional inequalities influence people's migration opportunities and found that people from Hungary's poorer Eastern regions firstly relocate to border areas which then they use as a springboard to find better opportunities in Western Europe.

Low salaries are highly interrelated with distortive perspectives and poor living conditions due to unproportionately high rental costs that are difficult to be paid from low salaries (cf. Brozova 2016, Pogátsa 2015, Verwiebe et al. 2014, Sik/Szeitl 2016). The motivation of working abroad is often to accumulate savings for founding a family or buying a house. Interviewees emphasized that despite of some supportive governmental measurements for having children (e.g. CSOK), current political measurements do not provide a secure future for young people as even dual-earner families struggle to maintain their family.

Big regional disparities demonstrate how the current employment system lacks opportunities and support for social uplift. Wealth redistribution is unequal as the current wage system does not select between low- and high-qualified workers. Currently, the newly entered labour force benefits from the system meanwhile long-standing employees are not compensated equitably (cf. Eurofund 2017, OECD 2018).

In correspondence to the literature, we can say that current industrial relations and the lack of knowledge-based economy pose obstacles in personal and professional growth of the labour force and in sustainable business and economic performance of Hungary (cf.

Böröcz 2012, Galgóczi 2017, Myant 2016). Interviewees highlighted that even in this current dramatic labour market situation, the government prefers to favour employers' will over employee's needs, supporting a profit-oriented employment attitude.

Concluding the research results, I can formulate the following social and political implications: The productivity and profitability of small and middle scale enterprises should be supported through governmental programs to avoid black employment and extensive exploitation of the labour force due to the lack of financial resources of employers. To boost bottom up initiatives, power should be distributed to all levels of management taking into consideration actual and punctual feedback of all labour market actors upon employment conditions. The state should establish controlling mechanisms over supply and demand, especially in health and education sectors, to stimulate replacement and effective redistribution of labour force. Political decisions and increment of wages are essential for a plannable future for young people.

Reflecting on the rapid spread of the global coronavirus disease, labour movements within the European Union drastically changed. In Hungary, the infrastructure paralysis resulting from safety measurements can further deepen regional disparities. Lockdowns can increase women's domestic burden and put them in a vulnerable position negatively influencing social reproduction. Additionally, the impact of this issue on the Hungarian mobility structure is not known yet. It would be interesting to study the chances of the labour force who lost their jobs due to the corona crisis but cannot re-enter the labour market and lacks the necessary cultural and financial capital to move abroad.

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