

CHALLENGES AND DEMAND FOR WORKERS IN SOCIAL CARE FOR OLDER PEOPLE

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Abstract: *The aim of this article is to assess the labor force needs in social services for older people in Romania, considering the challenges of the social care sector. Similarly to other European Countries, the social care for older people in Romania is characterised by a growing demand for care and a lack of human resources. At national level, the provision of care for older people relies on unpaid care of family members, formal carers, as well as on publicly and privately social services. The article points out differences between urban and rural areas in terms of job vacancies, measures adopted by providers in order to tackle the labour force shortages. Data presented and analysed within the present research were collected using a questionnaire based survey among managers of private and public providers of social services for older people. Results suggest that the low level of wages, the low status, and difficult working conditions are among the factors that make this sector unattractive.*

Keywords: labour force demand, social care, older people, strategies.

JEL classification: J08, J14, J23.

1. The importance to assess the demand for workers in social care activities and the main challenges

Scientific literature has pointed to several arguments in favour of estimating the demand for labour force in health and social assistance activities. In accordance with Dussault et al. (2010: 1-3) these could be grouped into the following categories: demographic, socioeconomic, and cultural changes that along with the migration flows have generated and continuous to influence the development of services; the expectations of beneficiaries, the technological progress, the organisational changes; as well as changes in the occupational structure and the feminisation of certain occupations. Sometimes the services provided in health and social assistance sector are between health care and social care. According to Vujicic and Zurn (2006: 103-104) and considering the limited resources, what is expected is not always achievable, because the demand for health care is not always equal with the actual need for such services. The authors consider that the dynamic of the human resources in this field is influenced by the demographic changes, economic factors, as well as by the socio-cultural context. Human resources and the costs associated are an important part of the total expenditures related to the delivery of such services. The demand for workers in health and social assistance is depending on the level of wages, public and private available funds, the structure of both social assistance and health sectors, the technological development, types of providers (Vujicic et al., 2004; Stilwell et al., 2004).

At national level, social assistance and health care services are experiencing a lack of human resources, especially in rural areas, due to the low level of wages and the isolation of the small communities. As a result, the available human resources are insufficient and most often, the continuity of care is not ensured (Banca Mondială, 2015). Not only the lack of human resources, but also the regional disparities have an important influence on the quality of care. Along with the demographic factors and migration, the increased participation of women on labour market and the changes of the family's structure are among the drivers that pushed the demand for different types of health and social assistance services (Ghența and Mladen, 2017). With a constantly growing share of population aged 65 and over (17.4% in 2016, +2.7 pp increase in the last decade) and even a higher proportion of the older population

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in rural areas (17.6% in 2016) than in urban areas (14.1% in 2016) (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2017a), rural localities might be the ones that will have to support greater difficulties in providing social services for the older people and the related costs. With regard to the older people, the development of home care services should be the main focus in order to ensure an appropriate response to the demographic challenges and the migration phenomenon, especially for rural areas in north-east and south parts of the country, areas characterised by a scarcity of available social services (Gheța and Mladen, 2017). Most often, the older people are living alone, have a low level of income, being more exposed to the need of social services compared to other categories of population, and these could stimulate the employment in social assistance services (Gheța and Mladen, 2017). It is acknowledged that the need for care of older people will require the development of a national system of long-term care services and within this system it is important to consider the integration of people in need of care into community and thus to promote prevention and rehabilitation measures in home care services. (Ministerul Muncii și Justiției Sociale, 2015)

The social services available for older people comprise services with accommodation and home care services. The first category includes different types of residential services. There is an expected increase in demand for home care services but also for those provided in residential units that might require more resources to provide the necessary funding, physical infrastructure and workers to the sector. The residential centers for elderly are designed as to supply several types of services: social services, social and medical services, and medical services. The number of public residential units for elderly constantly grew between 2008 and 2016, from 81 units in 2008 to 123 units in 2016, while the number of private units grew from 42 in 2008 to 246 units in 2016. The average monthly number of beneficiaries increased 5.6 times in case of private units and only 1.2 times in case of public residential centres (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2017b). As a consequence of this infrastructure development, the number of pending requests decreased during the same period, but remained still high: 2,915 pending requests in 2008, compared to 1,017 in 2016 (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2017b). However, in the development of the residential units should take into consideration the fact that home care for dependent elderly people is the first measure of support, the residential center being an alternative to home. The structure of the residential and home care services' staff consists of a wide range of occupations: family physician, ergo therapy instructor, physiokinetotherapist, kinetotherapist, dietitian, speech therapist, psychologist, occupational therapist, social worker, elderly care assistant, nurse, medical assistant, home care assistant. At national level, the number of persons employed in health and social assistance activities increased (mostly based on employment among women) between 2008 and 2016 compared to other sectors of economic activity, although the share of employed persons in this sector in total employment remained approximately the same in 2008 and in 2016: 4.6%, respectively 4.8% (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2017c). The vacancy rate in health and social assistance sector was 6.3% in 2008 and decreased with 3.6 pp until 2016 (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2017d).

2. Demand for workers in social care services for older people

2.1. Methodological aspects

In order to assess the need for workers in social care for older people and to identify the main factors that make the sector unattractive, we conducted a survey among the accredited providers of residential and home care services for older people. The field activity was carried out during September and October 2016. Data were collected using a questionnaire based survey among managers of private and public providers of social services. After data collection, quantitative descriptive analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 20. The standard error for the survey was +/-3.5%. The sample volume was calculated using the Taro Yamane formula (Israel, 1992), which leads to oversized samples if the population is homogeneous and undersized if the population is not homogeneous. Sampling was probabilistic, with the sample being representative at national

level. Two types of data collection tools - CATI and CAPI - have been developed and applied for this research. The themes included in the questionnaire covered types of jobs available at provider's level, vacancies available per occupations, reasons for the availability of jobs, length of vacancies, strategies to approach the vacant positions. The sample has been designed to respect the percentage distribution on residential area (rural/urban) and type of services offered (residential/home care centers). (see table no. 1)

Tabel no.1. The structure of the sample

Type of provider	Abdolute values			Percentages		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
Residential services providers	95	104	199	32	35	66
Home care services providers	21	79	100	7	27	34
Total	116	183	299	39	61	100

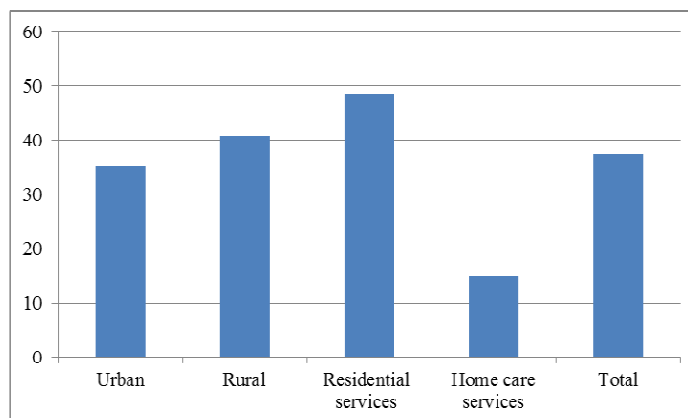
2.2. Results

Job vacancies and causes

One of the most important indicators to appreciate the demand for workers is represented by the number/share of job vacancies existing at the level of the social service provider. 37.5% of the social service providers participating in the field survey reported vacancies. Rural units and those providing social services with accommodation have reported a much higher percentage of available jobs, while only 15% of home care services providers reported vacant positions. (see graphic no. 1)

The number of job vacancies was collected from the social service providers participating in the field survey with regard to occupations for the care and assistance of the beneficiaries, defined within the national legal framework. Nurses were most often nominated by social service providers when asked to declare for what occupations they have vacant positions. This occupation was nominated by 53.6% of the residential services providers and 55.3% of the rural providers. Other nominated occupations for which social service providers had job vacancies at the time of the investigation were: social worker (nominated by 19.6% of the providers), psychologist (nominated by 14.3% of providers) and family physician (nominated by 18.8% of suppliers).

Graphic no. 1. Vacancies based on residential area and type of provider (%)



Source: INCSMPS Survey, 2016.

Approximately one third (35.1%) of the existing vacancies were opened for less than 3 months, while more than a quarter of the declared vacancies were available for more than 12 months. The highest shares of available jobs were declared in case of providers from rural areas or for residential services providers, with more than 12 months availability of the jobs: 33.3% of total vacant positions in the rural area and 30.2% of total vacant positions in case of residential services providers. Home care providers declared that nearly two thirds of the vacancies were vacant for less than 3 months, this situation being the result of a large fluctuation of staff (78.6% of home care providers that reported vacancies argued that the lack of workforce/personnel fluctuation caused by low wages contributed to the difficulty of filling the vacant jobs). (see table no. 2)

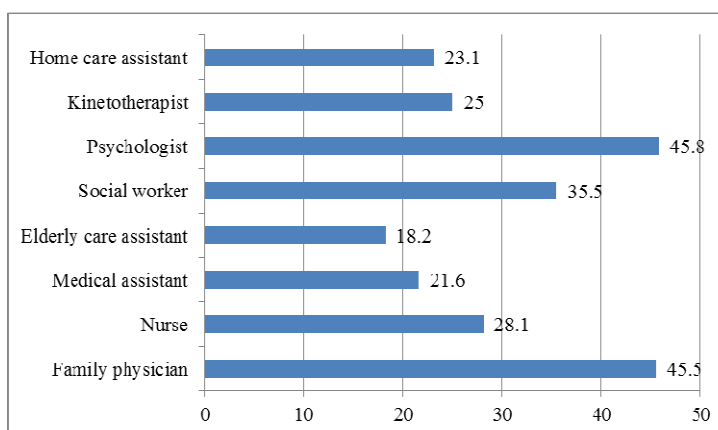
Table no. 2. Job vacancies by residence area and social assistance regime (%)

Number of months of jobs' availability	Total	Urban	Rural	Residential services	Home care services
< 3 months	35.1	37.1	32.2	32.3	63.2
4-6 months	11.8	11.3	12.6	12.5	5.3
7-9 months	10.0	12.9	5.7	10.9	0
10-12 months	14.7	13.7	16.1	14.1	21.1
> 12 months	28.4	25.0	33.3	30.2	10.5
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: INCSMPS Survey, 2016.

45.8% of the vacancies for the psychologist occupation, 45.5% of the vacancies for the family physicians and 35.5% of the vacancies for the social worker were the most difficult to cover, according to the providers' answers. (see graphic no. 2)

Graphic no. 2. Vacancies for more than 12 month, per occupation (%)



Source: INCSMPS Survey, 2016.

The number of months while a particular job is vacant is not in itself an indicator of skills shortages or labor shortages, as a job may be vacant for only a few months, but generally, employers may face constant problems in recruiting qualified staff for certain jobs. For this reason, the providers that reported the existence of vacancies were asked to give reasons for the difficulty to cover the vacancies in case of those positions they considered to be "rather or very difficult" to fill with appropriate staff. The most frequently cited reasons, regardless of the place of residence or the assistance regime, were (see table no. 3):

- a) the lack of labor force/staff fluctuations generated by the difficult working conditions in the health and social assistance sector (e.g., emotional stress, lack of equipment/equipment, staff shortage, etc.);
- b) the migration of qualified staff to countries with higher wages;
- c) the lack of qualified staff with a certain level of qualification proved with certificate/diploma.

Tabel no. 3. Reasons for job vacancies, based on residential area and type of provider (%)

Reasons	Urban	Rural	Residential services	Home care services	Total
The lack of qualified staff	56.4	57.5	55.6	64.3	56.8
The lack of job experience	29.1	30.0	32.1	14.3	29.5
Inadequate technical and technological skills	21.8	22.5	24.7	7.1	22.1
Insufficient soft or interpersonal skills	32.7	22.5	28.4	28.6	28.4
The lack of interest/staff fluctuations – low wages	81.8	65.0	74.1	78.6	74.7
The lack of interest/staff fluctuations – difficult working conditions	34.5	35.0	37.0	21.4	34.7
Migration of qualified staff	74.5	72.5	74.1	71.4	73.7
Other reason	18.2	25.0	22.2	14.3	21.1

Source: INCSMPS Survey, 2016.

Note: the question admitted multiple responses.

Lack of labor force could point to the fact that vacancies in this sector are jobs characterized by low added value and imply precarious working conditions. Alongside the lack of labor force/staff fluctuations generated by the precarious working conditions in the employment sector, the external migration of qualified staff lead to the conclusion that we should rather consider a labor shortage instead of qualifications shortage, as a main cause for the job vacancies in this sector.

Measures to approach the labor force shortages

Managers of the organisations surveyed mentioned different recruitment and retention strategies to tackle the job vacancies. Measures applied to recruit new employees influence the degree of employment and suitability of the workforce according to the skills required in institutions providing social services for the elderly. In order to ensure the number of professionals, it is important that institutions invest in human resource development (through training programmes) with the purpose to acquire new knowledge and skills which are necessary on medium and long term in the workplace. At the same time, it is important for institutions to promote the quality of labor supply by attracting new employees and by adapting the professional training to the needs of employers' institutions.

The recruitment method most commonly used by institutions is placing advertisements on the institution's website/at the premises (76.3%), advertising of vacant positions through public employment agencies (35.8%), followed by the internal recruitment of volunteers and trainees (33.4%). Other ways to attract professionals (33.8%) include advertisements in national newspapers or in the local press and personal referrals. Partnerships with educational

institutions are not considered as a current recruitment tool, accounting for only 14.7% for partnerships with higher education and only 11% for partnerships with pre-university education. Although partnerships with educational institutions are important to attract highly qualified staff, the survey data lead to the conclusion that over the past five years, the providers have not developed long-term strategies that include partnerships with educational institutions.

With regard to partnerships with higher education institutions and with pre-university (vocational) education institutions, a higher percentage of providers from urban area (18.5%) used these measures to recruit staff, compared with just 8.7% of rural providers. Placing advertisements on the institution's website/at the premises was a frequent choice for urban institutions (73.9%), as well and for those in rural areas (80%). Recruitment of specialized staff through private agencies was mentioned in a higher proportion by providers from rural area (10.4%), compared with those from urban area (6.5%).

There are no significant differences between residential services and home care services in terms of recruitment strategies. However, institutions providing home care services pay more attention to internal recruitment when such an institution has vacancies (45%), compared to residential services (27.6%). Both categories of service providers do not primarily cover the staff vacancies through partnerships with educational institutions. These partnerships are designed to provide long-term adequacy for young graduates with job requirements through internships for students and young graduates, as well as through apprenticeships schemes for graduates of vocational education programmes. Recruitment through advertisements published on the institution's website are most commonly used to attract staff for the vacancies (79.4% in case of residential centers and 70% in case of home care centers).

The attractiveness of the institution on the labour market has a fundamental role in both the recruitment and retention processes to cover the vacancies. Institutions providing social services have the potential to become an important employer. According to the survey, the practices to attract qualified staff are appreciated, in the majority of cases, as "*important*" and "*very important*". The answers of managers point to several strategies to increase attractiveness of the organisation and these cover:

- internships and mentoring activities;
- training;
- wage and benefits package;
- job stability;
- autonomy and flexibility in the workplace;
- flexible working arrangements.

Thus, the internships and mentoring opportunities for students and graduates and apprentices schemes are estimated to be very important by 40.8% of the respondents. In this case, institutions can support potential employees with career development opportunities through internship and mentoring programmes that are designed to provide professional practice and internships paid within the institution. On-the-job training and vocational training is considered to be very important to attract new employees by 56.9% of the managers.

Other issues considered to be very important in maintaining the attraction of the institution is the salary package (63.9%) and the long-term job security (65.2%). These two practices show the highest values in assessing the attractiveness of social service providers in the recruitment of new employees. (see table no. 4)

Table no. 4. The attractiveness of the institution

Categories	Very important	Important
Internships and mentoring	40.8%	46.2%
The work environment supports the autonomy and the professional development	43.8%	52.2%
Wage and benefits package	63.9%	30.8%
Flexible working arrangements	38.5%	47.5%
Training on the job	56.9%	38.8%
Long-term security of the job	65.2%	31.4%
Recreational activities together with the beneficiaries	47.2%	43.1%

Source: INCSMPS Survey, 2016.

Lower attention is paid to autonomy and professional development, even it was proved by previous research that autonomy is an important determinant for employee job satisfaction, good employment relationships, high degree of loyalty to the organisation (Lucas et al. 2009). The career prospects offered by both categories of institutions are perceived as "important" and "very important" for the recruitment and retention of employees: 97% of the managers of residential services and 94% of the managers of the home care services appreciate the importance of the attractiveness of a work environment that support autonomy and professional development. Also, on-the-job training occupies an important place: 94.5% of the managers of the residential centers and 98% of the managers of the home care services share this opinion. More than 95% of the managers' institutions surveyed believe that the long-term job stability is "important" and "very important" when a person apply for a job (96% in case of services with accommodation, respectively 98% in case of home care services).

The analysis based on area of residence shows that there are no significant differences between urban and rural areas in assessing the importance of practices used to attract staff. 3.6 pp more managers of urban institutions considered the favourable working environment for autonomy and professional development as important in attracting the workforce for the vacant positions.

Conclusions

The article draws attention to aspects related to the demand for workers in social care services for elderly. The study has contributions in terms of examining rural and urban difference and analysis of job vacancies characteristics and recruitment strategies for two types of social services: residential services and home care services.

At national level social assistance and health care services are experiencing a lack of human resources, especially in rural areas, due to the low level of wages and the isolation of the small communities. With a constantly growing share of population aged 65 and over and even a higher proportion of the older population in rural areas, rural localities might be the ones that will have to support greater difficulties in providing social services for the older people and the related costs.

The results underline that 37.5% of the social service providers participating in the field survey reported vacancies. Rural units and those providing social services with accommodation have reported a much higher percentage of available jobs, while only 15% of home care services providers reported vacant positions.

Nurses were most often nominated by social service providers when asked to declare for what occupations they have vacant position, regardless the area of residence of providers. Other nominated occupations for which social service providers had job vacancies at the time of the investigation were: social worker, psychologist, and family physician. Lack of labor force could point to the fact that vacancies in this sector are jobs characterized by low added value and imply precarious working conditions. Managers of the organisations surveyed mentioned different recruitment and retention strategies to tackle the job vacancies. The recruitment method most

commonly used by institutions is placing advertisements on the institution's website/at the premises, advertising of vacant positions through public employment agencies, and the internal recruitment of volunteers and trainees. With regard to partnerships with higher education institutions and with pre-university (vocational) education institutions, a higher percentage of providers from urban area used these measures to recruit staff, compared with providers from rural providers. Recruitment of specialized staff through private agencies was mentioned in a higher proportion by providers from rural area. The answers of managers point to several strategies to increase attractiveness of the organisation and these cover: internships and mentoring; training; wage and benefits package; job stability; autonomy and flexibility in the workplace; flexible working arrangements.

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