EMPLOYMENT IN BIHOR COUNTY. CONCRETE RESEARCH: "THE PERCEPTION OF THE EMPLOYERS OF BIHOR ON THE PUBLIC **EMPLOYMENT SERVICE"**

BEKESI Delia Georgeta

Department of Sociology and Social Work, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Oradea, Oradea, Romania georgianabekesi@yahoo.com

Abstract: This article carries out a quantitative, but also a qualitative analysis of the activity of Bihor County Agency for Employment (AJOFM Bihor) in 2018. In the first part, the article aims to treat the theoretical aspects related to employment, invoking the significance that the specialized literature attaches to the concepts of supply and demand of workforce, active population, employed population, labor resources, active and passive policies, as well as considerations on the impact of employment on the economy and the individual. Afterwards, a few quantitative aspects of the 2018 Bihor workforce structure are presented, as well as the results of a qualitative research carried out through interviewing 16 subjects, specialists from the socioeconomic units in the county, in their position of employer representatives. The research method used is the interview-based sociological investigation, which aims to capture all of the aspects that are subject to the study in an in-depth manner, and the investigation tool used is the interview guide. The qualitative research aimed to gather knowledge on the perceptions of the employers in relation to the activity of the Public Employment Service, represented by the Bihor County Agency for Employment (concerning the general activity of the service, the way in which the Job Fair is carried out, and the manner in which the employers communicate with the persons looking for a job). At the end, we present the conclusions of the research, which can be a useful tool for the public service in order to optimize its own activity. Thus, the analysis of the subjects' answers generally revealed that the majority of the employers have a positive view on the activity of the institution, believe that it is preferable to continue to communicate with it, arguing that it has numerous and quality resources, that it manages an accurate database of the unemployed persons in the county, divided by areas, levels of training and education, that it offers advice, qualification and re-qualification courses, offers an updated list of vacant positions, facilitating the identification of the persons appropriate for various jobs. Among the measures proposed by the subjects in order to optimize the activity are: more investments in advertising and online platforms, the involvement of vocational schools in the process of the entry of the youth on the labor market, and the timely notification and motivation of the skilled unemployed persons to participate in the Job Fairs.

Keywords: workforce supply and demand; total population; employed population; active policies; the Job Fair.

JEL Classification: J23: J24.

The Annals of the University of Oradea. Economic Sciences Tom XXVIII 2019, Issue 2 (December 2019)

1. Introduction

This article aims to treat a few of the aspects concerning employment in Bihor County in 2018, the last year on which we currently have final data.

In the first part of the article, we express a few theoretical points of view on the need to use the labor resources of a certain country or geographical area, demarcating the concepts with which we operate in this sense, respectively those of total population, active population, employed population, human resources, and workforce demand and supply.

The second part of the article, which has the highest degree of originality, is dedicated to the concrete research, carried out at the level of Bihor County and structured into two parts, respectively, a quantitative research based on the statistical analysis of the data offered by the AJOFM Bihor concerning the volume and structure of the total population, of the working age population, of the employed civil population, of the labor resources, of the unemployed and of the vacant positions in 2018.

Another part of the concrete research is the presentation of the results of a qualitative study, based on interviews, applied to a random sample of employers who participated in the Job Fair in order to know their opinions on their relationship with the Bihor Public Employment Services.

The final conclusions of the article also suggest a few possible measures for the optimization of the institution's activity, in order to reach its fundamental objective, to contribute to the growth of the employment rate in Bihor County by choosing the methods and means that are the most efficient and in consensus with the expectations of its own beneficiaries.

2. Theoretical considerations concerning employment

Employment can be analyzed from the perspective of the concepts of workforce demand and supply.

The workforce demand can be defined as the necessary number of workers, of various trades and professions from a certain geographical area and during a certain interval of time. This demand manifests as a result of the fact that labor is an important production factor, which, along with the other production factors, primary or original (natural capital, financial capital), participates in the production process, which results in goods and services that can be sold on the market. (Preda, 2002) The workforce supply represents the labor that the members of a society can perform for a salary. The theoretical approaches of the workforce supply are based on the relationship of interdependence between economic growth and the active population. Thus, on the one hand, economic growth has an impact on the evolution of the employees divided by activity sectors, social-professional categories, on the territorial and professional mobility of the active population, as well as on the quality, duration and difficulty of the labor. On the other hand, the active population can have a positive effect on the economic growth process through increased productivity, the

quality of the workforce, and its openness towards professional and territorial mobility. (Nica, 2011)

When examined during one point in time, the workforce supply seems influenced by several factors (Oprescu, 2001), such as: the size of the total population, the participation or activity rate, meaning the percentage of the working age population that is fit for work, working or looking for a job, the duration of the labor and the quality of the workforce.

Human resources represent the essential factor in the economic and social development of a country. They represent that section of the population that has the physical and intellectual capacities allowing it to perform a useful activity. (Nica, 2011)

Thus, the total population of a country is formed of the active and the inactive population. From an economic point of view, the most important demographic category is the active population, also called the potential workforce of the society, and it contains the employed persons: employees, employers, self-employed workers, unpaid familial workers and unemployed persons. (Mihăescu, 2001).

As of late, the approaches that highlight the qualitative side of the labor resources have been given considerable importance. The human capital theory, whose initiator is Gary Becker, emphasizes the importance of education and vocational training in order to economically capitalize on human potential.

The gain from investing in human capital does not only refer to the net amount of income attained throughout life from the sale of skilled workforce in contrast to that of unskilledworkforce, but also takes into consideration the subjective feeling of intellectual well-being, trust and social recognition. (Giarini and Liedtke, 2001).

Employing labor resources at as high a level as possible is an important national desideratum, a permanent objective of the governmental economic policies and workers' syndicate policies, having an impact on the population and the individual, aiming to avoid wasting the labor resources of the active population, as well as an impact on the level of the national economy, economic agents and social partners (Bădulescu, 2006: 11; Cojocaru and Pupp, 2010:394).

In order to efficiently capitalize on the workforce, there are adequate policies to decrease unemployment developed at governmental level in order to maintain and increase the employment rate through direct or indirect actions to stimulate employment both from the standpoint of the employers, as well as those who are employable, aiming to ensure jobs for the youth entering the labor market, for the unemployed, for persons with an employment risk, etc. (Odobleja, 2016: 72).

Employment is generally approached through two types of social policies: passive, which especially consist in granting unemployment benefits, and active, which aim to counteract the imperfections of the labor market, support the unemployed in their pursuit for a job through measures such as: professional information and counsel, the mediation of labor, vocational training, the stimulation of workforce mobility, supplementing the salaries of the employees, and professional advice and assistance in starting an independent activity or for the initiation of a business. Active policies are more costly than passive ones, but can reduce the rate of unemployment

ISSN 1222-569X, eISSN 1582-5450 **(1)**

and, thus, raise the employment rate and socio-economic productivity. (Neamţu, 2003)

3. Aspects concerning employment in Bihor County

3.1. The labor market in Bihor County, 2018 (Analysis carried out on the basis of the Activity Report by the AJOFM Bihor, 2018)

3.1.1. The structure of the labor resources in Bihor County

When analyzing the employment and ensuring of the necessary workforce, one should start from the labor resources existing at the national level or at the level of the analyzed region, in this case, the level of Bihor County. The base of the workforce resources is, on the other hand, the total volume of the population living in the area, in its concrete structure divided by age, gender, level of training, etc., which is why the analysis of the workforce market of Bihor will commence from the identification of the indicators mentioned.

In 2018, *the total population* of Bihor was 591,283, of which 304,172 were women (51.44%) and 287,111 were men (48.66%).

The working age population was 384,600 persons, of which 183,900 (47,81%) were women and 200,700 (52.19%) were men. The working age population consists of all men and women from the age of 16 up to the standard retirement ages.

The civil active population was 274,800 persons, of which 129,600 (47.16%) were women and 145,200 (52.84%) were men. We should mention that, in the civil active population, the persons who are past the working age of 16 and represent the available workforce for the production of goods and services are also included.

When it comes to the total labor resources, we can see that the working age population is about 65% of the total population of the county, the rest being children and persons who have exceeded the working age limit. Furthermore, the civil active population represents 71.45% of the working age population and 46.44% of the total population of the county.

Another element that can be mentioned here, which is relevant for the specifics of the labor resources in the county, is the fact that if, in the total population, the female persons represent over half, respectively 51.44%, within the other two structures, the situation is reversed, as over 50% is represented by male persons (52.19% in the case of the working age population, and 52.84% in the case of the civil active population). It is notable that the phenomenon is present during all analyzed periods both at Bihor level, as well as at national level, which suggests a higher risk of infant mortality within the male population (Chipea, 2015: 112-150).

3.1.2. Unemployment in Bihor County, 2018

At the end of 2018, the number of *registered unemployed persons* (4,074 persons) was lower than in December 2017 (6,497 persons) by 2,423 persons, but we should remark that the number of unemployed persons receiving unemployment benefits is approximately the same, with the decrease being due to the non-renewal of the claims by the persons with no right to such benefits. Furthermore, at the end of 2018, the registered unemployment rate at county level was 1.53%, which is lower by 90%

than the same month of the previous year. The unemployment rate is influenced both by the number of registered unemployed persons in said month, as well as the civil active population at the level of Bihor County.

In what concerns the structure of unemployment based on age categories, on 31.12.2018, the highest percentage was represented by unemployed persons aged 40-49 (28%), followed by those aged 30-39 (20%), and, when analyzing the level of employability, we can find that these two categories bear an employability level of "Very hard" and "Hard." (AJOFM Bihor Activity Report 2018)

When it comes to the structure of unemployment based on the level of training, the unemployed persons who have a primary education, a middle school education or a vocational education most often address the Bihor County Agency for Employment in order to identify a job and find employment. On 31.12.2018, the amount of these persons from the total number of unemployed persons was 45%. Unemployed persons who had a high school education represented 17%, while those with a university education represented only 10%.

3.1.3. The activity of the AJOFM in 2018

In 2018, 5,858 new entries for vacant positions, declared by employers, were registered in the database of the Bihor County Employment Agency. These positions were available on the workforce market, being identified through the weekly job reports transmitted to the agency through all communication channels.

The types and structure of the positions communicated by the employers throughout 2018 confirmed the county's, but especially the Municipality of Oradea's orientation towards activities in the *technical domain*, whether we are talking about production engineers, CNC operators or industrial robot operators.

For the persons with a higher education, the vacant positions covered a very wide array of trades, from engineer to economist, quality / sales analyst, programmer, network administrator, human resource / WSH inspector, sales advisor to university professor.

The most transmitted positions were meant to be filled by persons with high school or vocational education (56%), especially in *the activities related to commerce, services and tourism*, which were followed by those in the technical field and those in the medical field.

The professions requested on the workforce market were: commercial worker, salesperson, cashier, security agent, chef / sous-chef, server / busser, housekeeper, medical nurse, production / industrial robot / electronic component operator, mechanical fitter, technician, maintenance electrician, welder.

29% of the total number of positions registered in 2018 were for unskilled laborers, and the studies required by the employers were high school- or middle school-level: unskilledworkers in the light industry (the clothing industry or the industry of items made of leather or its substitutes), merchandise handler, subassembly fitter, kitchen worker.

Bihor County Agency for Employment, through its employment policies, supports employers through the application of measures to stimulate employment in order to create new jobs. The stimulation of the employers to hire the unemployed is done

especially through *the subsidizing of the jobs*. We should mention that the employers that can benefit from these subsidies are those who hire unemployed persons who are part of *the following categories*: graduates of educational institutions, people over 45, unemployed parents who are the sole providers in single-parent families, NEET youth, unemployed persons who, in 5 years' time from the employment date, fulfill the conditions for retirement, disabled persons. (art. 80, 85 of Law 76/2002, with amendments and additions). Other measures that support employers, but also the persons searching for a job refer to labor mediation and the stimulation of the mobility of the workforce, and an efficient method for labor mediation is the organization of the General Job Fair. (Onica-Chipea, 2015: 75-120)

3.2. Qualitative study concerning the perception of employers in Bihor on the Public Employment Service

3.2.1. The objectives of the study and the research methodology

The *purpose* of the qualitative study that will be presented below is to know the perception of employers in Bihor on the Public Employment Service, represented by the Bihor County Employment Agency.

The research objectives consist in: identifying the general perception of the employers in Bihor on the Public Employment Service; the identification of the general perception of the employers in Bihor on the General Job Fair; the manner in which the employers and the AJOFM communicate.

The research method used was the interview-based sociological investigation, which aims to capture, in an in-depth manner, all of the aspects that are subject to this study, while the investigation instrument used was the interview guide.

The interview guide is structured into 3 dimensions and contains a total number of 14 questions. The first dimension has to do with the general perception of employers on the AJOFM Bihor, and the questions contained here are meant to identify the opinions of the investigated subjects on the services offered by the AJOFM Bihor, to know the most accessed services, and to find the measures for the optimization of the services, according to the opinions of the subjects.

The second dimension of the interview guide concerns the organization and operation of the General Job Fair organized by the AJOFM Bihor, with the questions addressed to the employers focusing on knowing their opinion on how the Job Fair is organized; identifying the employers' expectations in what concerns this type of activity; whether the firms that they represent have participated in other such job fairs, and what the actions or activities are that could contribute to aiding employers in identifying potential employees during these events.

The third dimension has to do with the web portal launched by the AJOFM Bihor, locuridemuncabihor.ro, and the communication methods that the employers prefer in their interaction with the Public Employment Service. The questions contained here aim to discover: the problems encountered by the subjects when accessing said web portal, as well as the website of the institution; the main reasons for which they access these websites; what measures they would recommend for the improvement of information transmission towards and from the AJOFM Bihor.

ISSN 1222-569X, eISSN 1582-5450 🕮

The universe subject to this investigation is represented by all employers in Bihor, while *the sample* consists of 16 employers or representatives of employers selected from those who participated in in the Job Fair organized by the AJOFM Bihor in April 2019.

The positions of the 16 subjects are: recruitment specialist, human resource inspector, commercial director, sales agent supervisor, marketing and PR executive, human resource coordinator, human resource analyst, administrator, financial clerk, head of human resources and assistant manager.

The type of the research is qualitative, and is not representative from a statistical point of view due to the small number of interviewees, but it can be a starting point for more in-depth and larger scale research, and the data obtained can be useful reference points for the formulation of certain theoretical conclusions, and it can especially represent a practice optimization instrument for the Public Employment Service of Bihor.

3.2.2. The results of the research

Through the analysis of the discussions and answers, a series of conclusions have resulted concerning the perception of the employers on the Public Employment Service of Bihor (PES), which we will synthesize using the dimensions presented: 1. Employers' general perception on the PES

When asked "How would you briefly characterize the activity carried out by the AJOFM Bihor, based on your latest interactions with the members of the organization and the services offered?," most employers (15 of the 16 subjects) expressed their satisfaction in what concerns the activity of these services, appreciating their manner of organization, the efficient communication, and the quality of the services offered. The interactions of the employers with the employees of the service have been deemed adequate, underlining their direct and efficient involvement in the identification of the personnel appropriate for the specifics of the various jobs offered. When asked "What are the services that you access most frequently and how do they help you in carrying out your activity?," most of the interviewees (14 of 16) answered that the most frequently accessed services are the institution's site, the database of unemployed persons, and the communication of the vacant positions. The employers also mentioned that a form of communication that was often used was the direct communication with the employees of the AJOFM Bihor for the purposes of notification concerning the available courses and the organization of job fairs.

When asked "If you were to propose actions for the improvement of the AJOFM's activity, what would be the most important for employers, respectively for identifying a job opportunity?," the employers gave answers that can be systematized into a few categories: the priority orientation of attention and investments of time, financial resources and competencies toward appropriate advertising; better visibility of available positions such that they can be accessed by a public that is as diverse as possible; the intensification of the collaboration with the schools that fit the profile of the vacant positions, including through promoting an online environment that is as friendly, accessible and simple as possible.

The final question of this first dimension, namely "Would you recommend the AJOFM Bihor as a recruitment solution? If so, why? If not, why?," most employers (14 of 16) claimed that they would recommend the AJOFM as a recruitment solution, as the institution has many more resources of much higher quality, also benefitting from an adequate office in the county. Other arguments mentioned by the subjects to support their recommendation were: the Public Employment Servicehas a database with all unemployed persons in the county, divided by localities and qualification levels; they offer professional advice, as well as qualification and re-qualification courses depending on what is needed; based on the requests made by the employers, the Public Employment Service draws up and continuously updates a list of vacant positions, which is then made public through all of its means of communication, leading to a higher chance of finding the employees compatible with the requirements of those vacant positions.

Even if the vast majority of the subjects expressed favorable views of the AJOFM Bihor, which could be an effect of a social desirability bias, two of the sixteen subjects were more reserved, explicitly mentioning that they would not recommend the AJOFM as a recruitment solution, as they considered private specialized firms to be far more motivated in recruiting the persons appropriate for the vacant positions. This can, at least, be an impulse in the process of continuous improvement of the AJOFM's own activity such that they become even more competitive.

2. The General Job Fair

When asked the first question of this dimension, respectively "How would you characterize the event as it is currently (in terms of expectations, positive and / or negative aspects, etc.)?," most employers (15 of 16) expressed favorable opinions, believing that the organization of such events "helps people find a job" and that "it is a very good idea since employers get to meet their possible future employees face-to-face." They also believe that the event is as ample as it is because it has "a very high visibility on the labor market."

The main issues that the employers have is that "the same people came frequently," and the participants (the persons looking for a job) "are not well prepared for the requirements of the vacant positions."

When asked to "Please state a few results that you have had by participating in this event (number of candidates interested in the offer promoted, number of persons selected for an interview, number of persons selected for employment, impressions referring to the participants, etc.)," the employers expressed their satisfaction with the fact that there were many interactions, but they were dissatisfied due to the fact that: the number of people interested in their offer was small and that "unfortunately, too few met the expectations," and so, the number of persons selected for an interview and who were eligible for hiring was too small.

The employers who participated for the first time in this event stated that they were pleased, even if they did not find suitable people to hire, because they became better known on the labor market.

When asked the third question, "Has the organization that you represent ever participated in other such events organized by the AJOFM Bihor? What about you?," most employers answered that both the interviewed subjects and the organizations

they represented have participated in other such events. There were also a few employers (4 of 16) who claimed that, although their organization has participated in other such events, they personally were participating for the very first time, and, in two cases, neither the organization, nor the interviewed subject had ever participated in such an event, expressing favorable opinions in line with those mentioned above by the other subjects.

When asked "If the representative of the employer has participated in other such job fairs, how would you characterize this event in comparison with other events that you have participated in?," the subjects who had participated in other such events expressed favorable opinions about the current event, invoking arguments such as: there was a very large number of employers in comparison with other events that they had participated in; the location of the event is more adequate in terms of size; When asked the final question of this dimension, namely "What actions / activities do you think could contribute to supporting employers in identifying potential employees at events such as the job fair?," some employers suggested that it would be necessary to invest more in advertising andonline platforms. They also believe that vocational schools should become more involved in the process of the youth's entry into the labor market, and that skilled unemployed persons should be notified in a timely fashion about the organization of such an event.

Most employers, however, said that everything that is already being done is sufficient and that they have no activity to propose that might aid them.

3. Web portal / Communication

The first question included in this dimension – "When you wish to obtain information on the labor market / facilities offered to the employers, what means / methods do you use in order to be informed (visiting the headquarters of the AJOFM Bihor, phone, e-mail, website, etc.)?," most employers (12 of 16) stated that the method that they preferred was the e-mail, website or phone. Some employers (4) mentioned that they prefer visiting the headquarters of the AJOFM, as they preferred direct contact with the specialists and the persons looking for a job.

When asked "What are the main reasons for which you use http://www.bihor.anofm.ro/, in order to obtain information, in comparison with other means / methods?," the employers gave answers that fell into a few categories: in order to continuously visualize what the vacant positions are; in order to download various forms; in order to see the legislation in force; because it is the fastest and most accessible means.

When asked "Do you use the web portal locuridemuncabihor.ro? If so, have you encountered issues when using the web portal? If so, can you specify the issues encountered?," most employers (10 of 16) answered that they do not use this web portal, while those who did stated that they had encountered no issues.

One single employer stated that they encountered issues when using the web portal, as it froze and failed to load, but they also stated that they had reported the issue to the employees of the AJOFM Bihor.

When asked "What are the measures that you would propose for the improvement / facilitation of gaining / transmitting information from / to the AJOFM Bihor?," most employers stated that they had absolutely no improvement measure in mind, as they

considered the communication between the AJOFM Bihor and the employers to be very good, which is possibly the effect of a social desirability bias.

4. Conclusions:

- The analysis of the activity of the Bihor County Agency for Employment in 2018, through the structure of the vacant positions managed, shows an orientation of the county's economy, based on the period analyzed, towards *the technical domain*, as most vacant positions were for *engineers*, production engineers, CNC operators and industrial robot operators.
- Most of the communicated vacant positions were meant for persons with *a high* school or vocational school education (56%), a large portion of which had to do with activities related to commerce, services and tourism, which were then followed by those in the technical and medical domains.
- 29% of the vacant positions were activities for unskilled laborers, of whom employers request middle school or high school education.
- In order to stimulate employment in accordance with the needs of the employers, the AJOFM Bihor applies a series of policies for employment stimulation, pursuant to the legal provisions.
- The purpose of the interview-based qualitative research carried out on a number of 16 employers who participated in the Job Fair was to know the perception of the employers in Bihor on the Public Employment Service of Bihor.
- The analysis of the answers given by the subjects generally showed that most employers have a positive view on the institution's activity, considering it preferable to continue to interact with it, arguing that it has numerous quality resources at their disposal, that it manages an accurate database of the unemployed persons in the county, divided into areas, levels of education, and degree of training, also stating that it offers professional advice, qualification and re-qualification courses, and an updated list of vacant positions, facilitating the identification of the adequate persons for various jobs.
- When it came to the Job Fair, most subjects had favorable opinions, appreciating the possibility offered to the employers and potential employees to interact directly, and the preoccupation for identifying adequate locations. They were, however, dissatisfied with the small number of participants and the inadequate quality of their training, which are elements that lower the possibility to recruit the persons adequate for the vacant positions.
- When it came to communication, the subjects specified that their preferred method was the e-mail, website or phone, while some preferred direct contact with the specialists and the persons looking for a job.
- Even if the opinions of the subjects were, for the most part, favorable in what concerns the institution, the fact that two subjects answered that they would recommend a private service for recruiting and selecting personnel, as they are more motivated and offer higher quality services, should provide an impetus for the personnel of the public service to continuously perfect their activity.

- Among the proposals for measures made by the subjects in order to optimize said activity, we have: the necessity to invest more in advertising and online platforms; the involvement of the vocational schools in the process of the youth's entry into the labor market; the timely notification and the motivation of skilled unemployed persons to participate in the Job Fairs.

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