

EMPLOYMENT-RELATED HABITS AMONG STUDENTS MAJORING IN TOURISM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF DEBRECEN

SÁNTA Ádám Kálmán, KOZMÁNÉ CSIRMAZ Éva

Department of Tourism and Hospitality, Institute of Rural Development, Regional Economics and Tourism Management, Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Debrecen, Debrecen, Hungary

santa.adam@econ.unideb.hu

kozmane.csirmaz.eva@econ.unideb.hu

Abstract: *Youth unemployment is one of the most pressing problems in the world today, which, through its spill-over effects, affects more than just young people. From an economic point of view, it is also important to examine at what age and with what type of qualifications do young people start to work or how mobile they are. These factors have an impact on the current and future tendencies and developments in a country's labor market and thus in its total economy. Despite the actual trends among the generations that have grown up during their university years, it has been observed in recent years that students are paying more attention and becoming increasingly conscious in their specific expectations when choosing their future workplace and working conditions. This paper reviews some of the tendencies of starter labor generations that can be observed in Hungary. In our study, we examine the active work experience of full-time BA and higher education vocational training students at the University of Debrecen, majoring in tourism focusing on what work experience they have, what factors do they associate to labor market, can attract them, how they are affected by the issue of employment, and what their preliminary expectations and plans may be in connection with subsequent employment. In our research, we tried to draw conclusions based on the obtained results, with which we can help either higher education institutions or employers by exploring the needs and intentions of young people related to labor. We wanted to explore what the most important aspects are that influence students when they have to decide whether to leave their current residence because of a job opportunity. Our study was conducted using a student questionnaire in which the questions focused primarily on work-related experiences, job expectations, the relocation effects of more developed residential areas, and mobilization.*

Keywords: *career starters; labor market; school leavers; mobility, work expectations; youth employment.*

JEL Classification: *I23; J21; J60.*

1. Introduction

The situation of young people and career starters (age group between 15-29) is always of paramount importance for the future and prosperity of a country, as this age group provides a human resource reserve for a nation state. Employment also plays a key role for young people studying at universities, as it enables them to

finance part or all of their own training, to contribute to the well-being of their families, or to lay the foundations for their future existential plans.

According to the statistics data provided by the Hungarian Statistical Office, more than 258 thousand young people were employed in Hungary in some form among the primarily university age group (20-24 age group) in 2019 (HCSO, 2019a), which is 5,86% of the total Hungarian employment (4.47 million people). Compared to 2010, this means almost 52,000 more employed young people in this age group, thanks to Hungarian and international employment and internship programs, and the increasingly conscious career planning of young people.

Our research focuses on the expectations of the generation of career starters and whether they are aware of the opportunities and realistically see the labor market. Thus, the question arises as to what the students themselves expect in connection with employment, on the basis of which criteria they choose a job, what factors can motivate and influence them and what plans and ideas they have for their future occupation. Therefore, we conducted a survey among the students of the tourism and hospitality course of the University of Debrecen to find out what they expect from the future.

2. Literature review

The employment situation in Hungary shows a more favorable picture year by year. The positive shift can be observed in the 20-24 age group after the global economic crisis of 2008, starting in 2011 (HCSO, 2019a). 201.1 thousand young people aged 20-24 were employed in 2011, while in 2019 it reached 258 thousand people. At the same time, the employment rate of this age group increased from 33.1 to 48.4 between 2011 and 2018 (HCSO, 2019b).

Youth Guarantee, the related European-level program and a study carried out in 2016 also focus on providing a good quality job offer, apprenticeship, other type of traineeship or short-term traineeship and further training to young people shortly after having completed their studies or those who lost their jobs (Tosun, 2016; Krekó et al., 2019). In this way, it is intended to lower the unemployment rate of the younger generation entering the labor market and start them in their careers.

Based on differing interpretations of the modern definition of work (Robertson, 1985; Lane, 1991; Rimler, 1992; de Foucauld, 1996), we can conclude that work remains a means of satisfying emerging needs, as wages and other benefits received in return for work serve as a means of payment when we want to satisfy our own emerging needs. However, work is also the basis of culture, one of the possible ways of our participation in the functioning of society, but at the same time the fundamental layer of our social embedding and social interactions (Móré, 2018).

In our modern world, work also means a certain level of security (R. Fedor, 2018). This is not only because individuals can provide basic living conditions (housing, food, clothing, etc.) from the income they receive in return for work, but also because, in the absence of work, i.e. those who do not have a job are locked out of many services, including mainly public services whose pre-requirement is employment itself. Therefore, without work, they have to anticipate the lack of these benefits (e.g.

social security). In order for people to avoid job losses, unemployment and the associated lack of benefits, higher education can provide a kind of guarantee in the labor market (Bartus and Róbert, 2019; Mincer 1974, 1991; Kertesi and Varga 2005). This type of assurance is permanent despite the dangers of mass higher education, such as the negative change in the value of diplomas and how employers value them, which have been highlighted in several studies (Polónyi, 2000; OECD, 1997, 2006; Balázs, 2014; Eichhorst and Rinne, 2017; Varga, 2019). Based on research conducted in the Hungarian scene, in the long run, a university degree is still a well-paying investment for young Hungarian, pre-employment, early-career generations (Galasi, 2002; Róbert, 2002; Zerényi, 2017; Fenyves et al., 2020).

At the same time, one of the most dangerous factors for a country's labor market supply is not the value of diplomas, but the fact that the number of generations entering the labor market is much lower than that of exiting generations (Pongrácz, 2018; Siskáné Szilasi et al., 2017; Kőmíves et al., 2014). In Hungary, in 2010, there were still 6 million 736 thousand people of working age (15-64 years old), and by 2017 their number had decreased to 6 million 415 thousand. In 2018, the number of employees decreased by another 46 thousand people and by that time their number was only 6 million 369 thousand (HCSO, 2019a). In our opinion, the importance of the role of younger generations may increase in the coming decades. As everything in the world is constantly changing, so can work-related requirements, attitudes, and employees' expectations of employment.

Also in Hungary, the need for employee efficiency and success ratio has emerged on the part of institutions and, in part, employers operating at the ministerial level, which requires and classifies the factors determining the effectiveness of human resources into two categories. The first can be called direct factors. This category includes factors that can be measured properly and objectively from the statistics point of view. This category includes factors such as population, education and economic activity. The other indirect group, which includes public safety, housing, or entrepreneurial willingness, is much more difficult to express in terms of metrics (Polónyi, 2016).

However, in addition to population, acquired qualifications and practices and efficiency expectations, another important threat lurks in our modern world, especially against developing countries, as well as developed countries and regions that are considered poorer than others. This is nothing else than the mobilisation provided by better employment opportunities. Because of their livelihood, many people choose mobility mainly when employment is difficult in their place of residence (Udvardi and Urbánné Mező, 2016; Kőmíves et al., 2018). This issue also arises in the younger generations, especially after finishing their own studies, i.e. when the transition to employment needs to take place. Therefore, nowadays, mobility has become a part of people's careers. It can be stated that mobility is becoming an increasingly common practice in Hungary as well and a kind of social norm among young people (Nagy, 2018), especially in those social strata who are looking for work in precarious situations in their area of residence (Vysotskaya, 2017).

In addition to internal migration, since the change of regime in Hungary, the society has become increasingly involved in international migration processes. The accession to the European Union in 2004 accelerated this process, thanks to which the number of Hungarian citizens leaving the country for a short or long period of time is increasing. These people are mainly migrating to countries of the EU that are economically and socially more developed, such as Germany, Austria, France and the United Kingdom, which is ceased to be a member of the EU from 2020. Opportunities such as emigration is becoming more and more accepted and common among Hungarian youth as their life strategy. This phenomenon can be traced by the drastic increase in the proportion of young people leaving Hungary for a shorter or longer period of time to study or work. The main reasons for emigration are uncertainty about the future, dissatisfaction with actual changes and also missing changes in the education policy, as well as growing dissatisfaction with the social welfare system. Motivations that strengthen emigration also include the easing of the administrative conditions for studying abroad (Blaskó and Gödri, 2014; Caporale and Gil-Alana, 2014; Siskáné Szilasi et al., 2017).

3. Material and methods

Our study presents the results of a questionnaire survey conducted among university students studying at the Faculty of Economics of the University of Debrecen.

The final questionnaire was completed following a paper-based pilot survey. The questionnaire survey included active, full-time students studying on the Faculty's Debrecen campus (169 people), all of whom were between 20 and 25 years of age. This is important because we were able to adapt to the labor surveys of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office, in which the 20-24 age group is usually assessed as a separate segment, as this is the career-starting generation, which represents the supply of human resources. The questionnaire contained 24 questions, four of which assessed socio-demographic data and 20 were aimed at students' attitudes, their intentions to participate in training, wage demands, and relocation motivations in the form of closed questions.

The response rate was high, we managed to reach all students selected for the sample by the preliminary criteria (study status, work schedule, major). However, this is also a limitation of research. The present research only focuses on students majoring in tourism and hospitality. However, we plan to extend the research to students of other majors, possibly other faculties in the future, in order to get a complex picture of the entire university student base.

Prior to multivariate statistical studies, the sample was presented based on demographic data. As a next step, we analysed student opinions, expectations, and intentions. In the analytical work, we used Microsoft Office 2013 Excel and IBM SPSS 24 for Windows, with the help of which we evaluated the answers given by the students in the survey. Cross-tabulation analysis was one of the most commonly used forms of multivariate analysis. The statistical procedure related to cross-tabulation analysis is the chi-square test, which is applied to the values observed

and expected in the case of independence. In this analysis we use the p value and the value of significance belonging to the chi square (Barna and Székelyi, 2008).

4. Results

The aim of our survey was to find out what the tourism and hospitality students of the University of Debrecen expect from the future in the field of employment and what they will be willing to take for a job. The survey included 167 full-time university students with active student status and students in higher education vocational training. 73.05% of the students participating in the survey are female and 26.95% are male, which covered the total number of active, full-time, BA or higher education vocational training students in the tourism and hospitality training program of the Faculty of Economics of the University of Debrecen. 34.13% of the students participating in the survey have their permanent residence in a city, 32.34% in a county seat, and 17.96% in a village. 2.99% of them live in a large village, while 10.18% live in a town of county rank but not in a county seat. Only 2.40% of students have their permanent residence in the capital.

94.01% of the students surveyed had their own regular income, which does not include financial support from their own families or income from scholarships obtained during their studies. Of those who had their own income, 44.31% earned less than 30,000 HUF net per month, 20.96% earned between 30,000 and 50,000 HUF and only 5.98% of students came close to or exceeded the net amount of the guaranteed minimum wage in 2020. In terms of age, 55.09% of the students in the survey are between 21 and 22 years, 37.13% are between 18 and 20, and only 7.78% have reached the age of 23, but all of them are younger than 25.

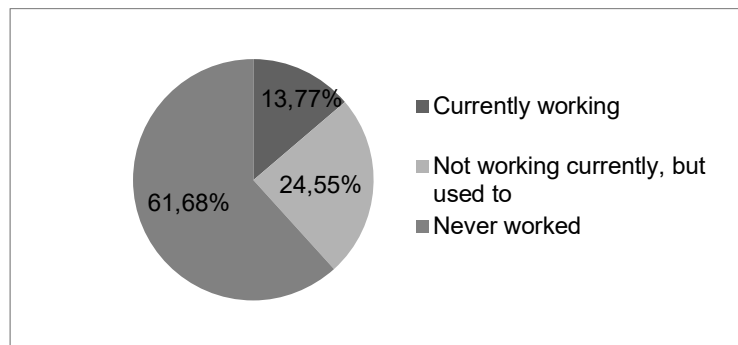


Figure 1: Proportion of students with work experience (%)

Source: Own editing

86.23% of the surveyed university students already had some work experience. 24.55% of them are currently working on the side of their higher education studies (Figure 1). 50.60% of them found work through their family members and acquaintances. It is common for students to be employed in some form in small and

medium-sized family businesses. In addition, student work intermediaries are significant, with 25.30% of respondents finding work through these organisations. As regards respondents' future plans, two-thirds of them would like to do work related to their current university studies. 13.79% of them thought that they specifically wanted to find a job in an area related to the economy later, but not in the tourism and hospitality sector. Of the students who want to work within the tourism and hospitality sector, 30.69% plan to be active in the accommodation sector. 25.93% of them think that organising travels would be the right area for them, and 17.46% would choose hospitality and the provision of gastronomic services as their profession. Event organization is the fourth most important item on students' preference list (3.70%). However, 8.99% of university students had not yet made a decision about what field they would like to work in.

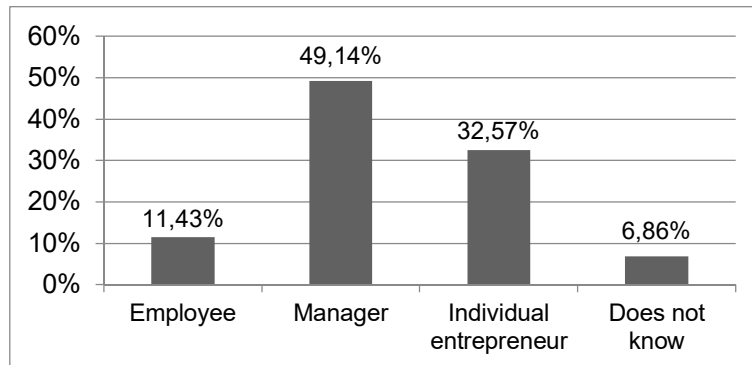


Figure 2: Employment forms preferred by students
Source: Own editing

In connection with preferences related to different fields of work, we were also curious about what form of employment they would like to work in the future. As a matter of course, the employee form was broken down into subordinates and managers (Figure 2). A significant proportion of the responding students (49.14%) are preparing to work in a managerial position (for example, head of department, shift manager) in the foreseeable future. In addition, it was highlighted that 32.57% of students would like to work self-employed after finishing their university education. In the survey, we also examined how students perceive the issue of leaving their career and whether they plan to work in areas that require knowledge other than their degree. 50.30% thought they would like to find a job in the area they are currently studying for, while 13.77% already thought they would leave the field of tourism and hospitality after finishing their studies at university.

We examined whether there is a discrepancy between the intention of students living in different settlements to leave the field. In the cross-tabulation analysis, based on the chi-square value ($p=0.278$), it can be concluded that there is no significant difference between the students' opinions, i.e. it does not matter where they live when they have to form an opinion on the topic of leaving their field of profession.

When students were asked what gross salary they thought would be expected with a degree in higher education, most of them (41.32%) thought that a gross salary between 200 and 250 thousand HUF would be appropriate. This sum is in line with the average net earnings of full-time employees in Hungary, without benefits, which were 244,609 HUF in 2019 (HCSO, 2020).

We raised the issue of whether the respondents' salaries could change over time. We asked students what gross salary they would expect for a young person working in the economy 5 years after graduation from a higher education institution. 38.92% of them believed that the expected gross salary level would be between 300 and 350 thousand HUF. 11.38% would expect a gross salary over 400 thousand HUF, but 6.59% think that the expected gross salary would be between 200 and 250 thousand HUF.

Similar to leaving the field of profession, we did not find any significant difference in salaries among students. Whether in terms of the starting salary expectations ($p=0.531$) or the post-experience salary ($p=0.911$), there were no significant difference between the students' opinions, i.e. it does not matter where they came from to study at the university, either from a small village or more populated county seats.

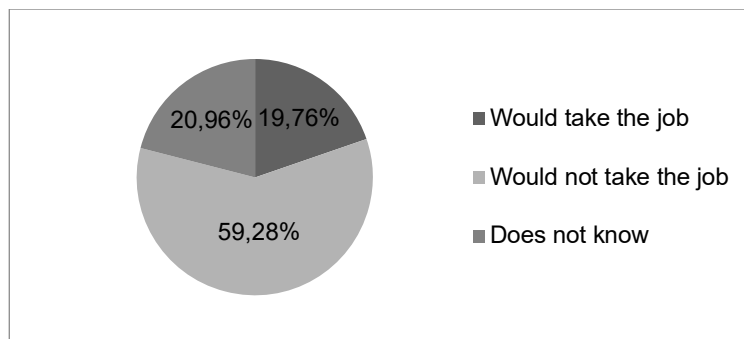


Figure 3: Distribution of employment intentions relative to salaries below the expected wage level (%)

Source: Own editing

We asked students whether, based on their current position, they would take a job with a salary lower than their own wage expectations (Figure 3). Based on the obtained responses, we found that 59.28% of university students surveyed believe that they would not take a particular job under any circumstances if they were offered a salary lower than their own salary expectations. However, 19.76% of them thought they would be willing to deviate from their preliminary wage expectations.

In relation to this aspect, the question also arises as to whether students are satisfied with their own settlements in terms of employment, or whether they prefer to seek prosperity elsewhere. 24.55% of respondents thought they wanted to work in the same settlement where they currently live. At the same time, 54.49% of students

thought that they would like to work in a settlement other than their current place of residence at a later date.

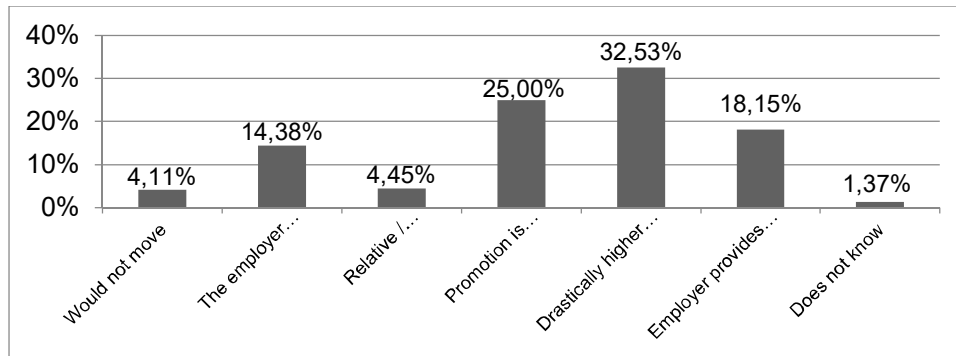


Figure 4: Presentation of results for which students would be willing to move to another Hungarian city in connection with a job opportunity
Source: Own editing

Among students' arguments in favor of leaving the current area of residence, the primary consideration is a salary drastically higher than the wage level in their current living environment (Figure 4). According to this statement, 32.53% of them would be willing to move to a Hungarian settlement much further away from their place of residence if the potential employer offered them a higher level of pay than they could receive in their current place of residence. In the event that an employer can provide predictable, guaranteed professional advancement in the long run, 25.00% of students would be willing to relocate to another settlement. 18.15% of students would be willing to move elsewhere if the employer in a given new settlement could provide non-wage benefits that are not available in their current area of residence. If we look only at the topic of commuting, the most important factor that would make students willing to regularly travel to a settlement larger than their current place of residence, i.e. to commute, was the amount of wage. 59.85% of respondents believed that an achievable higher wage level was the most important incentive in favour of commuting.

In the event that commuting should be replaced by resettlement, the level of wages (36.67%) was also indicated by students as the primary motivating factor. However, better housing conditions (23.64%) were also considered to be a particularly important factor.

For this reason, we can see that the amount of wage was the most important factor that could encourage students to relocate, whether in the form of commuting or by moving permanently.

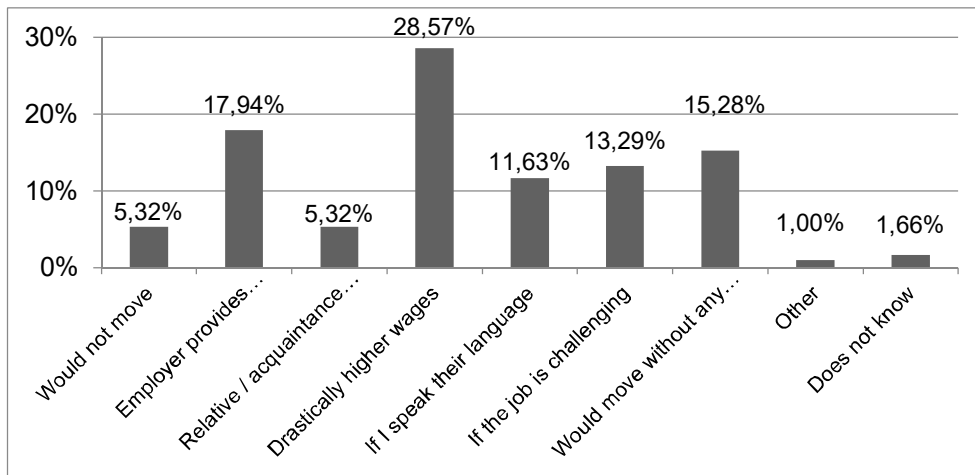


Figure 5: Presentation of results for which students would be willing to move to a foreign city in connection with a job opportunity
Source: Own editing

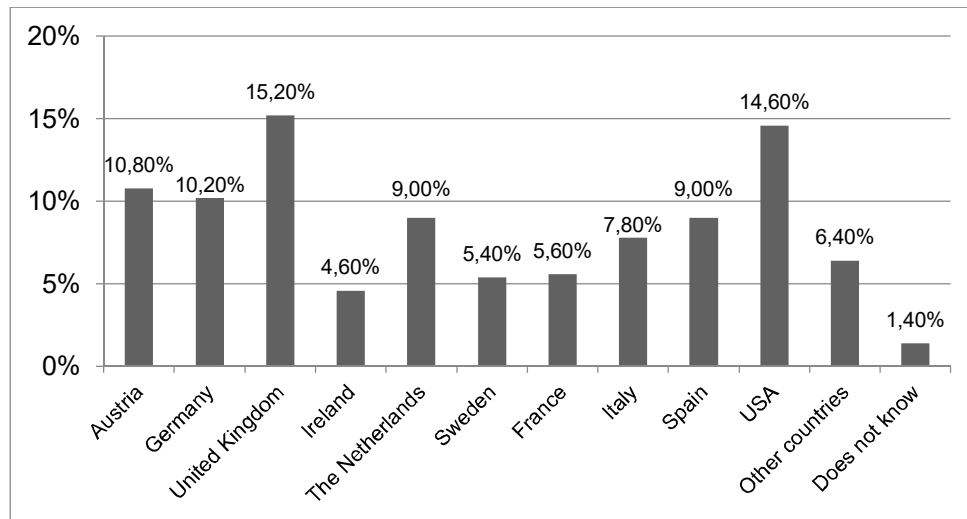


Figure 6: Students' preferences of potential places to work abroad
Source: Own editing

We examined what might be the primary factor that can make students willing to move to a foreign city for work (Figure 5). As a result, it can be concluded that for 28.57% of the respondents, similarly to the motivation of moving to a different place within Hungary, the drastically higher salary was the most important factor that would make them willing to work abroad. In addition, accommodation provided by the employer (17.94%) and jobs with challenging tasks not available in Hungary

(13.29%) were identified as other important factors. 15.28% of students believed that if they got a better opportunity from abroad than the job offers available in their area of residence, they would be willing to move to another country and work there without any other conditions.

The respondents indicated the most influential English-speaking countries (Figure 6), i.e. the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as the German-speaking countries, i.e. Germany and Austria, as the target countries for a possible work abroad. Only after these groups of countries did Europe follow with its New Latin-speaking countries, of which Spain and Italy were considered attractive to students. The other frequently mentioned potential destinations were Norway, Switzerland, Japan and Australia.

5. Summary

The situation of young career starters is always a key issue for the future and prosperity of a nation. Based on recent years, the employment situation in Hungary is showing an increasingly favorable picture. In the age group of people between 20-24, which represents the supply of labor, a positive shift can be observed from 2011 onwards. The significance of this phenomenon lies in the fact that early employment benefits young people and creates the basis for individual fulfillment, which is financed by the pay they receive for their work, i.e. different forms of early work can help the younger generations. However, work also means a kind of security, and not only because workers can provide the basic conditions for their initial existence from the income they earn, but also because, in the absence of work, they would be deprived of several public services for which having a job is a prerequisite.

Despite the fact that, in the long run, higher education degrees are still considered a well-paying investment among young people starting their careers in Hungary, several factors pose a threat to the supply of a country's labor market. Examples include the issue of the value of higher education diplomas and their evaluation by employers due to mass education, as well as the number of current generations entering the labor market and the total population, as well as efficiency expectations and mobilisation, which can be a problem mainly between developing and developed regions.

In our related survey, we involved 167 full-time university students with active student status and students in higher education vocational training. More than four-fifths of them already had some work experience. 94.01% had their own income from regular work, which does not include family allowances and income from scholarships. During the survey period, 44.31% of those with their own income earned less than HUF 30,000 net per month, and 20.96% earned between HUF 30,000 and HUF 50,000.

It is important for students to do work that is related to their current university studies. 30.69% of them plan to live in the field of accommodation. 25.93% of respondents think that organising travels would be a suitable field for them, 17.46% would like to be in the field of hospitality and 3.70% would like to work in the area of event organisation. Based on the knowledge they gained during their studies and their

subsequent practice, the majority of students believed that they would work in some managerial position (e.g., department head, shift manager) in their future job. However, they showed a keen interest in continuing their future activities as individual entrepreneurs.

But only a quarter of respondents wanted to work in the same settlement where they live. 54.49% of students thought that they would like to work in a settlement (city, county seat) different from and larger than their current place of residence. The primary consideration in the change of settlement was the drastically higher salary than the wage level available in their current living environment. This aspect was followed by the possibility of guaranteed and predictable career advancement and by the fact that the employer would be able to provide them with non-wage benefits that they cannot achieve in their current place of residence.

Many of the students who took part in the survey thought they would be willing to live and work abroad for a longer or shorter period of time. They would be happy to move to a foreign city if their pay was drastically higher than what they could achieve in Hungary, if their employer initially provided them with accommodation, making it easier to move, and if they filled challenging jobs that they felt were not available at home. First on students' list of potential foreign countries to work in were the United Kingdom and the United States of America, as well as the German-speaking countries, i.e. Germany and Austria, as these countries were considered reasonable and accessible destinations, followed by Spain and Italy.

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