

THE EFFECTS OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES IN THE SOUTH WEST OLTENIA REGION

Author(s) Gheorghe Augustin CÎJMĂROIU¹, Natalița Maria SPERDEA²Marius VLADU³

Institutions (1) *University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Bucharest, 59 Mărăști Avenue, București, Romania*

author email: augustin11nnn@yahoo.com

Institutions (2) *University of Craiova, 13 Alexandru Ioan Cuza street, Craiova, Romania*

author email: nataliasperdea@yahoo.com

Institutions (3) *University of Craiova, 19 Libertății street, București, Romania*

author email: mariusvladu@yahoo.fr

Corresponding author email: augustin11nnn@yahoo.com.

Abstract

The coronavirus pandemic has strongly affected every sector of the economy. Every organization, every employee within the organizations, had to adapt to the situation and adopt new ways of doing the work at the workplace. Of course, the development of human resources within organizations has acquired another dimension. The focus was on trying to maintain jobs and developing human resources through the means available to the organization in this pandemic context. Telework was introduced and human resource financing activities through European projects were reduced. The implementation of projects with non-reimbursable European funding was quite difficult during the state of emergency and then in the state of alert, which led to a decrease in continuous professional training activity and, implicitly, to the development of human resources in the South-West Oltenia region.

Key words: human resources, pandemic, european funds

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of the labor force in the South-West Oltenia Region in recent years was influenced, in general, by the same factors that affected the entire economic and social life of our country:

- the decrease in the birth rate which affects the structure of the young population of working age - effect of the decrease in the standard of living and the uncertainty of tomorrow;
- the restructuring of certain sectors of activity and unprofitable enterprises, which also determined massive redundancies;

- the difficult integration of the socio-professional categories that have been laid off;
- the decrease in the level of training and qualification of salaried personnel;
- the deterioration of the standard of living, paradoxically, concomitant with the technical-economic progress;
- Increased digitization that has penetrated all sectors of activity
- the pandemic with the Sars-Cov2 virus that caused redundancies, sending many employees into technical unemployment and the adoption of telework;
- the urban environment is more developed than the rural environment and with more

and more diverse employment opportunities

The state of emergency declared at the national level and then the state of alert that lasted almost two years, produced major changes in all fields of activity, the workforce registering an atypical dynamic.

The non-reimbursable funds from the European institutions were hardly used in human resource development, given all the restrictions that were imposed during the pandemic.

At the same time, the Ministry of European Funds allocated additional funds and made interventions more flexible to combat the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to be able to observe the dynamics of the use of European funds for the development of human resources, we carried out an analysis of the elements that were influenced before, during and after the pandemic.

The analysis was carried out based on the statistical data available on European and national specialized websites, and an analysis of the implementation of projects with European funding by means of a survey based on a questionnaire carried out within the organizations and the population of the South-West Oltenia region.

The data taken from the statistical websites were analyzed: the labor market, the active population by residence, age groups, the activity rate, the unemployment rate, vacant jobs, jobs by activities of the national economy in the SV Oltenia region , enterprises that offer continuing professional training.

The questionnaire-based analysis was carried out at the level of 24 organizations whose field of activity is the organization of professional training programs in the South-West Oltenia region, 37

organizations that usually send their employees to continuing professional training courses, and 200 employees from the South-West Oltenia region regarding the need for training, the opportunity to organize professional programs and the courses organized during this period.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Dynamics of the labor market in the South-West Oltenia Region

The changes of recent years mark the beginning of a new dynamic in the labor market. The number of employees has undergone changes both in the urban and in the rural environment (fig. 1):

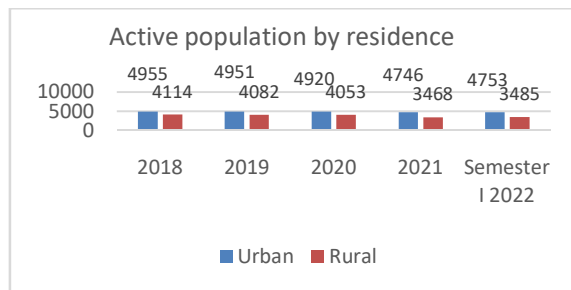


Figure 1

The effects of the pandemic led to a decrease in the number of employees, a fact that affects the economic development of the area, as well as the purchasing power of the population (fig. 2).

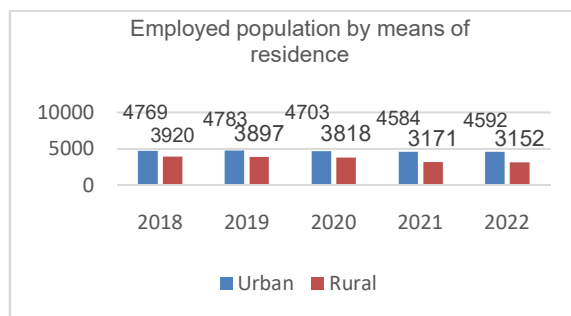


Figure 2

Taking into account people who do not have an occupation, from figure 3 we can see that starting from 2021 and continuing

with 2022, the number of inactive people in the rural environment has increased considerably, while in the urban environment, their number has remained approximately constant.

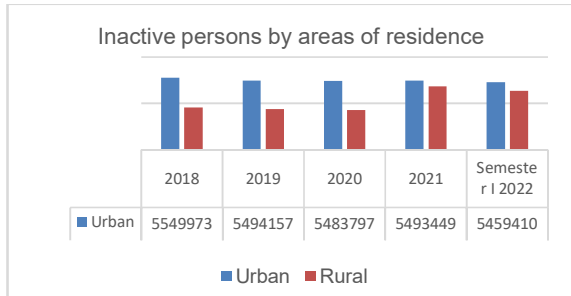


Figure 3

The unemployment rate increased in Southwest Oltenia by 3.8 percentage points in 2021 compared to 2019.

Taking into account the activity rate by age groups and residential areas, the situation at the level of the South-West Oltenia region is presented in figure 4

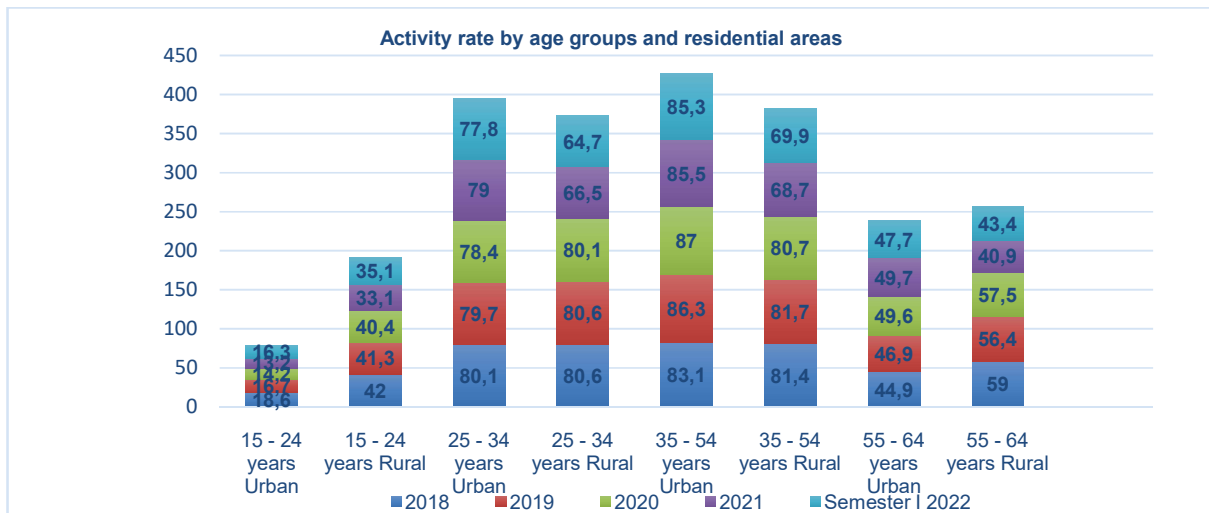


Figure 4

The highest activity rate in the South-West Oltenia region is in the age categories 25-54 years, higher in the urban environment than in the rural environment. It is interesting that, in the 15-24 age group, the situation is reversed, i.e. the highest activity rate is in the rural area and not in the urban area. This fact is explained by the fact that in the rural environment, due to a rural

mentality, the young population does not follow studies in proportion to the population in the urban environment, but takes a job to be able to support themselves. In the urban environment, young people are much more concerned with education, graduating from a high school and higher studies, which is why they start working at an age that exceeds, in most cases, 25 years.

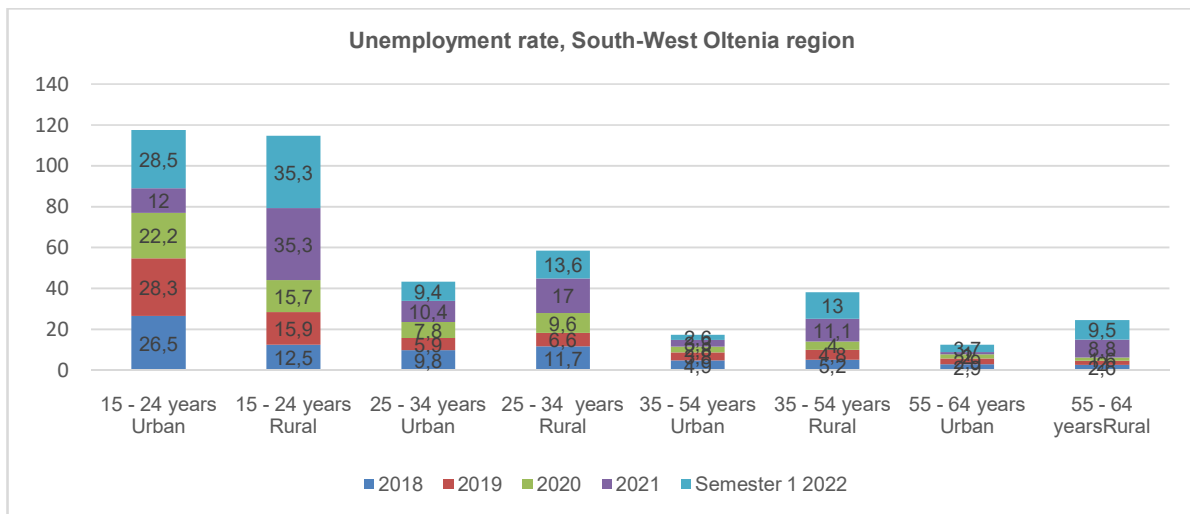


Figure 5

In the analyzed period, 2018-2022, the unemployment rate in the Southwest Oltenia region is also higher in the 15-24 age group. With clear increases during the pandemic period, denoting that employment has undergone major negative changes due to pandemic restrictions and reduced activity in many sectors of the economy. Such negative effects were also observed regarding job vacancies during the analyzed period in the South-West Oltenia region (fig. 6).

Statistically analyzing this situation by major groups of occupations, we notice that the most vacancies were in elementary occupations and specialists in various fields of activity, The fewest vacancies were those of qualified workers in agriculture, forestry and fishing and in management positions in the public administration.

If we analyze the table of vacant jobs in the South-West Oltenia region by activities of the national economy, we observe the following (fig.7).

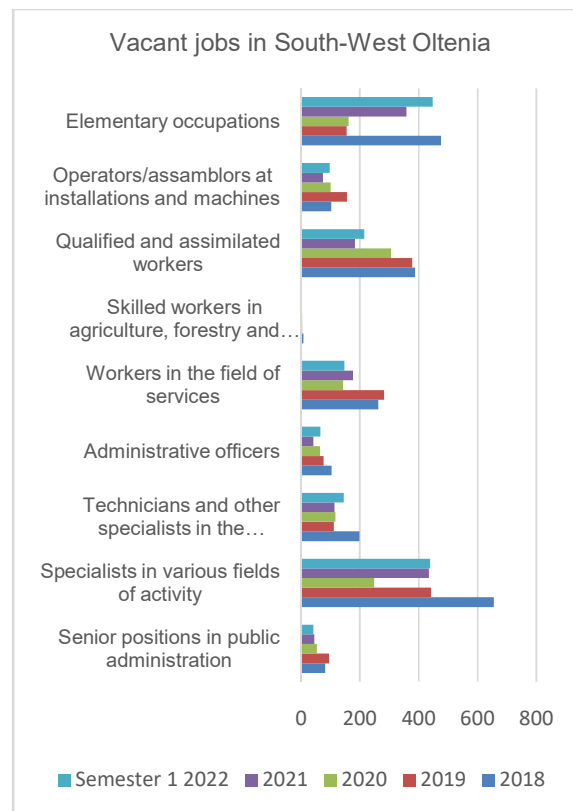


Figure 6

The analyzed period is 2019-2021, that means before, during and immediately after the pandemic period, during which major changes occurred in terms of the number and structure of jobs requested on the labor market.

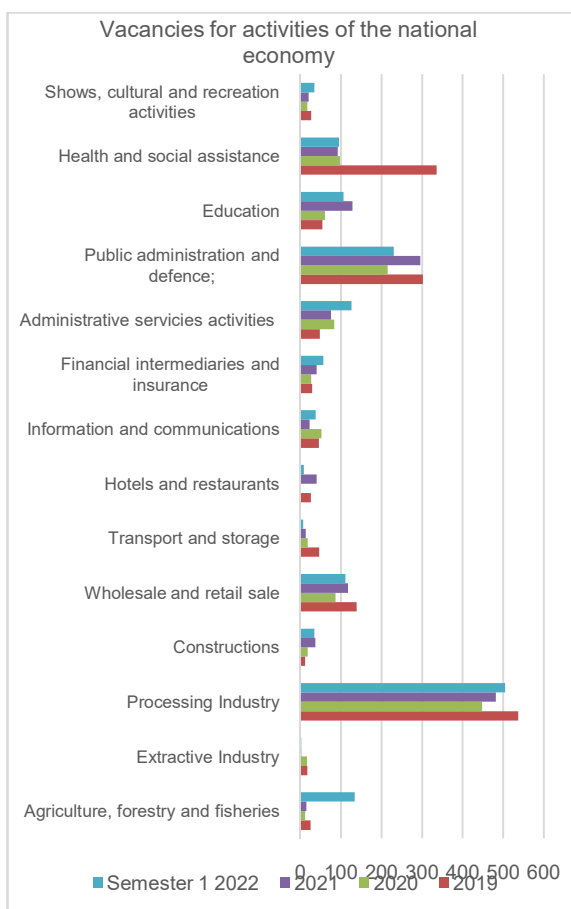


Figure 7

We observe an increase in job vacancies during the pandemic in sectors of activity such as: agriculture and fishing, processing industry, public administration and financial intermediation and insurance. At the same time, job vacancies decreased in the fields of: transport and storage, hotels and restaurants, health and education.

We note that the pandemic produced substantial and unexpected changes in the Southwest Oltenia region and throughout the country, changes that led to economic and social crisis. The standard of living decreased, the degree of poverty and social deprivation increased, as did the unemployment rate and the inactivity rate. Many organizations were forced to curtail activity and send employees into technical unemployment.

Regarding the professional training of employees, the situation was also quite difficult, taking into account all the restrictions imposed during the state of alert that lasted for almost two years.

There were also many restrictions on the organization of vocational training programs that made this process difficult and made it impossible for staff from organizations or individuals who care to obtain or qualify to attend the courses.

During the state of emergency and the period immediately following it, professional training in physical form was prohibited. Only professional training programs that could be held online could be organized, that is, those programs that did not require physical presence at the practical activities. In the state of alert, the organization of training programs was allowed but with certain restrictions related to the number of participants in the professional training programs, the capacity of the theoretical and practical training rooms, the existence of disinfectants and protective masks, restrictions related to the distance among the students or the number of people who can participate in the course.

The results of the survey based on the questionnaire

The results related to the questionnaire distributed to organizations practicing professional training also reveal the difficulty of organizing this activity during the pandemic.

83.33% of the professional training companies surveyed stated that the training activity decreased during the pandemic, the only training programs they organized being those within the projects with European funding, less those requested by the organizations. The most requested vocational training programs during this period were the introductory

ones, the Entrepreneurial Competences and ICT being the most requested and the qualification ones, with very few requesting advanced or specialization courses.

At the same time, these companies mentioned that the expenses related to the organization of training programs increased because the imposed restrictions required new expenses that decreased the profit achieved.

Another problem encountered by these companies was related to finding clients, 73.83 stating that organizations no longer use these services in the last period of time, this activity being postponed, most of the time.

The organizations surveyed on the opportunity for professional training of employees answered (59.45%) that although professional training is a priority within the company's activities, they prefer to save financial resources for paying salaries, their current activity being limited, 67.56% of the companies saying that their activity was affected and they had to restructure the positions or send part of the employees into technical unemployment. 62.16% of the companies turned to European funds in order to develop human resources, 37.84% having to train their employees from their own resources.

Regarding the questionnaire administered to the physical persons, 70.5% of the persons questioned stated that they would not have participated in any form of training activities during the pandemic, not necessarily because of the restrictions but because they wanted to protect themselves and they do not enter the community, no matter how much they needed the vocational training programs. The remaining 29.5% stated that they participated in training programs during

the pandemic, but conducting the courses was more difficult. A percentage of 65.5% of the respondents participated in continuous professional training programs through projects financed from European funds, 29.5% were trained from the financial resources of the company, only 5% of them specified that they followed a course from personal financial resources. When asked what kind of training programs they followed, 8.5% of respondents followed courses not authorized by the National Qualifications Authority (especially personal development courses or foreign languages courses), 19% followed an initiation/improvement/specialization course, 72.5% one qualification (especially those of level 2 qualification of 360 hours).

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CONCLUSIONS

The pandemic brought one of the most unusual forms of an economic and social crisis: on the one hand, in the South-West Oltenia region, as in the whole country, the restrictions led to the slowing down of the pace of economic development, to the loss of jobs, rising unemployment and inflation; on the other hand, the pandemic has led to the adoption of telework as a viable alternative to traditional work and to the online support of training programs, a fact that was not achieved before the pandemic. Vocational training, although it faced countless obstacles and difficulties, resumed within normal parameters and

even more enriched in terms of methods, techniques and working tools within the training programs carried out. It cannot be said that the human resource has stagnated in its development, but has been enriched with new ways of training, skills and new learning abilities. The companies, although they encountered difficulties maintaining staff, managed to overcome this period and resume their activity at acceptable parameters.

European funds constituted a considerable resource during the pandemic for the companies that accessed these funds in order to train and develop human resources.

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