

HUNGARY'S YOUNG, TECHNICALLY EDUCATED WORKFORCE ENGAGED IN WORKING ABROAD

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Abstract

This article is a demographic summary of a research database capturing the reasons that young Hungarians have left to work abroad, their typical age, target country, and their planned duration of overseas work. It is the preliminary product of the processing of research data collected over 4 years from interviews with more than 380 young Hungarians who are working, or have worked, overseas. In addition to demographic data, the research also captures the Hungarians' reasons for moving abroad, their environments, background, and the extent of their integration to the host country. Additionally, the interviews collected information about how prepared the person was when they started working abroad, if their language skills were adequate, if they obtained the job through a company or on their own, and if they were able to get jobs appropriate to their education and skills and match their expectations as engineers. The data are presented in a summarised, intermediate form, and will form the foundation of further research.

Keywords

work abroad, technical education, young work force, demographic summary

1. Introduction

This study draws on a database that is collected mainly by master's students studying social sciences and economics. Our duties are – as university lecturers and researchers – to pay attention to the labour market position of graduates and follow the evolution of their careers. Within the framework of the International Management course, students have therefore conducted structured interviews with those who attempted to work abroad. Our goal is to grant access to the Hungarian reality through the eyes of young people, particularly those with technical qualifications.

“What do they know of England, who only England know?” was Kipling's lament: that the country's neighbours knew and cared so little about their achievements, and obligations, in the wide world. Though it was asked in 1891 [1], Kipling's rhetorical question continues to be topical today.

2. Literature review*Hungarian labour market landscape*

In the 1990s, following the transition shock, Hungary was one of the leading economies in Central and Eastern Europe. It had a

high share of foreign direct investments, its economy was modernizing and there were favourable convergence trends (in terms of GDP per capita), all of which manifested itself in a relatively high standard of living and good economic prospects. This trend ground to a halt in the first half of the 2000s and the country's leading position gradually disappeared. The reasons were many and varied, but a high budget deficit and uncontrolled spending (which resulted in increasing public debt) were important elements [2].

According to the survey of Csehné Pap [3], the typical situation for graduates is that nine months after finishing vocational education, less than half of the young graduates were in work – neither holding a job, working as an entrepreneur, or self-employed. What can those young unemployed people do to find a job? If family background allows, they continue their studies either at a higher level or by pursuing a profession qualification, with which may then increase their chances of finding work. On average, more than a quarter of the graduates were engaged in further studies nine months after leaving secondary vocational education. According to the 2014 study of Pásztóy [4] the ambition to study further is more common among women than men.

There are, however, families that are unable or even unwilling to support further education; young graduates from this kind of background are simply unemployed. Youth unemployment is increasing and is high in international terms. The reasons for this are varied: primarily, the unemployment rate depends on the participation rate of the corresponding age group, which is connected to the proportion of those in school, the type of vocational school system (i.e. classroom or dual vocational training; how much practical and work experience those at school receive) and also the practice of students at school being employed part time. All these reasons combine to make activity among young people rather low in Hungary [5].

According to another survey, “when questioned about the knowledge obtained during their education - the interviewees judged themselves rather negatively. Less than half of the respondents/students felt that he/she adequately acquired the skills of the given trade. The tendency of undervaluation, mentioned often in the literature, can play a part in this, as well as the school experience, when one evaluates himself or herself on the basis of the marks received in school.” [6].

Unemployment in the 15–24 age group is high. If, however, instead of examining the youth unemployment rate (relative to

the active population), we look at the youth unemployment ratio (the number of unemployed young people as a percentage of the total youth population), the result is rather better. The Hungarian youth unemployment rate was 26.1 per cent in 2011, while the EU-27 average was 21.4 per cent (i.e. it is nearly 25% higher than average in Hungary). However, the youth unemployment ratio was around 6.5 per cent in Hungary, compared to 9.1 per cent in 2011 in the EU-27 – i.e. the Hungarian ratio is more than 30% lower than the EU average. Youth unemployment rates reflect the difficulties faced by those young people who are on the labour market [5].

Csehné Papp says in a 2014 study that the reason for high unemployment is the high proportion of respondents nominated for the "skilled workers" (48%) and "not proper approach to work" (42%). High values are obtained even the "inadequate training" (38%), the "infrastructure deficiencies" (35%), the "employer's attitude" (37%) and "inappropriate attitude to learning" (32%).

In the light of these data it is not surprising that young people try their luck abroad. But such journeys are not only undertaken by unemployed youth.

Competencies required for working internationally

The process of adjusting to a foreign culture is always a long road, and managing differences abroad requires the following skills:

- Interpersonal skills are most often the most important. They help to integrate the person into the social fabric of the host culture. They satisfy the needs for friendship and intimacy, but also facilitate the transfer of knowledge, and improve coordination and control.
- Linguistic ability: this helps to establish contact, indicates an eagerness to communicate and to connect with host nationals. However, it is often most effective to pick up bits of ‘conversational currency’ (local expressions, information, and interest) rather than speaking the entire language.
- Motivation to live abroad; expatriate should select themselves based on a genuine interest in other cultures and new experiences.
- Tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity: action often has to be taken on the basis of insufficient, unreliable and/or conflicting information. Additionally, circumstances may change unexpectedly, and the behaviour and reactions of local people may be unpredictable. Expatriates should therefore be able to tolerate uncertainty and ambiguity. This often requires letting go of control and ‘going with the flow’ of the host culture.
- Patience and respect: this is necessary because different cultures have different rhythms and it takes time to understand the local way of doing things.
- Cultural empathy: this requires respecting behaviour, ideas, feelings, thoughts, and experience of others.
- Strong sense of self: this allows interaction with another person or culture without fear of losing one’s own identity. This also enables the manager to be self-critical and open to feedback. It also reinforces the ability to handle stress.
- Sense of humour: humour is important on two levels: as a coping mechanism and for relationship building. It is seen as a way for managers to buffer frustration, uncertainty, and confusion [7].

Culture shock

Culture shock can often be a disturbing phenomenon, but it is not that sudden as the term ‘shock’ implies. In most cases it is the gradual decrease from positive to negative mood after the initial euphoria of arrival, and an actual crisis resulting from that. As it is also used to describe the entire adaptation process, the word

‘shock’ does not appear to fit too well. The disturbing impression does not always effect the own cultural concept. In some cases the experience of culture shock might even strengthen cultural identity, which is not the best approach either. The factors that cause culture shock are not really unwelcome, but they are foreign and different, and thus irritating. It is this irritation that is actually unwelcome [8].

Homesickness is an emotion for which prescriptions cannot be written in advance. It can only be prepared for in theory but when it arrives, it urgently requires a cure. These experiences can lead to depression.

The various psychological and physical symptoms of expatriatism are covered thoroughly in this work. Nevertheless, this does not mean that it is impossible to overcome these issues and become functioning again. Culture shock also varies largely in severity.

Some adapt more quickly while others need a longer time to get adjusted, but most people do overcome the crisis. Appropriate intercultural training and therefore intercultural competence helps a lot during the culture shock process, but unfortunately it cannot always be avoided. Altogether the assumption was not completely wrong. Culture Shock is a shock caused by being confronted with a different culture, but there is far more to the concept than that [8].

Experiencing a variety of symptoms and outcomes is a completely normal physical and psychological reaction to a foreign environment [9].

"It is a myth that experiencing Culture Shock is a weakness or a negative indication of future international success. Culture shock in all its diverse forms is completely normal and is part of a successful process of adaptation." [10].

"Culture shock is the best and maybe even the only means to experience and understand foreign cultures." [11].

The anxiety and stress related to the adaptation process are not intrinsically bad. The extent of adjustment does not depend on whether the negative symptoms of culture shock are experienced, but how they are coped with. In fact, they can have positive outcomes in the end, by serving as a hint that something is not right and therefore motivating thinking about how to adjust [12].

Culture shock serves as an indicator that there is something to explore about the foreign as well as the own culture [11].

In many cases, people move back because of the difficulties caused by culture shock. Who knows the correct answer for those questions: to go abroad or stay at home? Or to stay abroad or to return home?

3. Method

Data in this research was collected by students of Szent István University attending the International Management course. The students conducted structured interviews from which the data was collected, cleaned and coded to be used in SPSS software. In SPSS correlations, cross table analyses, frequencies and averages were examined.

4. Data summary

In the course of our culture shock research, a preliminary analysis of the data was created to summarise some commonalities between Hungarians who moved abroad. 43% of the participants of the survey were female and 56% male. Out of 180 respondents most of the people (82%) had a university degree at the time. The average age at the time of moving was 28.5 years (Figure 1).

The majority of people in the study tried their luck right or shortly after graduating from university, but most of them already had at least 2 years’ work experience.

Out of those who left Hungary, 30% went to English-speaking countries and 24.5% to German-speaking countries. 73% of respondents moved within the European Economic Area, 9%

moved to the USA and Canada, and 14% ventured to other parts of the world (Figure 2).

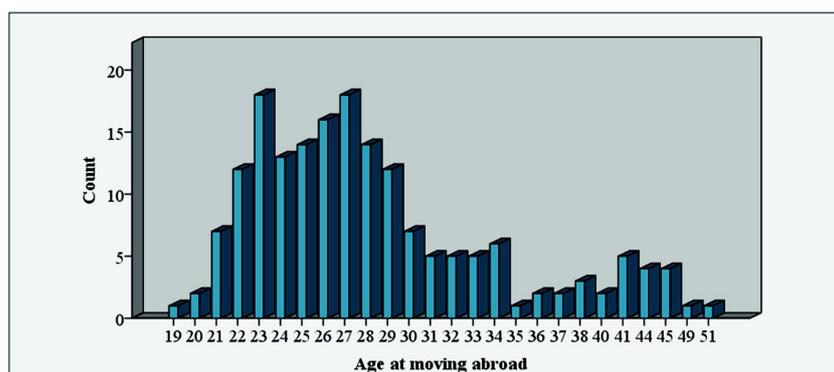


Figure 1. Age of moving abroad

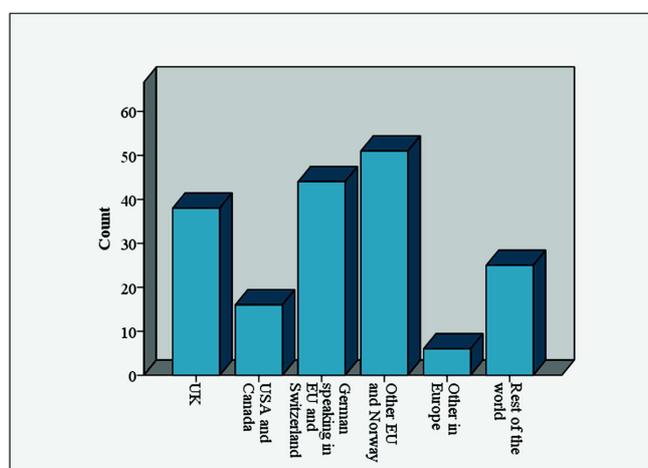


Figure 2. Countries to which Hungarians moved

When trying to start a new life abroad it is always an important factor if expatriates can do what they are best at: namely finding a job in their own profession. Finding the best job depends on many things. Applicants have to be better than others to get the job, so having a university degree and appropriate experience is always an asset, but speaking the accepted working language on a professional level is also essential, otherwise their performance will be hindered.

On average 79% found a job in their own field, but achieving that appears to be easier with a university degree, since 85% of graduates managed to do that compared to the 48% success of the people with only middle school education.

Having prior work experience mattered most in the question of getting a job in their own profession, since 89% with experience managed to achieve that compared to 58% who had no experience.

Generally, moving to a higher position while working abroad was very rare, which could be explained by the average short time spent abroad by the people questioned in the research. The average time spent abroad is 2.5 years but this includes people who have already lived and worked for more than 5 or even 10 years outside Hungary. Those who did step up in the hierarchy generally started very low and spent at least 4-5 years in the same company.

All the people in the survey had at least a basic knowledge of the working language of their chosen territory but most (86%) had at least good or excellent command of the language. The most

typical working language was English at 74% followed by German at 35%. In several cases, more than one language was used at work.

Only 35% started looking for a job on their own; 65% of respondents were either recommended by someone already working at the company, or were hired with the help of a recruitment company; the remainder were sent overseas by the organisation they were already working for.

At the time of moving most of the people were single, not even in a casual relationship. Only 24% were married or living with someone. Out of the people who were married, 60% moved with their family.

Summary of people with a technical background

31% of survey participants had a technical profession, 87.5% of them accompanied by with a university degree. Out of those, 89% found a job in their chosen field. The gender ratio for this answer shifted compared to the total number asked: in this group 89% were male and only 11% female.

The selected countries for technical workers differed slightly to those selected by all respondents. Technical people tend to choose German speaking countries (37.5% compared to 24.5% when looking at all data), and 25% went to English speaking countries. 80% stayed in Europe, while 14% ventured to other parts of the world excluding the USA and Canada, where 5% found jobs.

Half of technical respondents already had some years of work experience at the time of moving, and were in the 25-29 age group. 98% of these got a job in the same or higher position than

in Hungary, but promotion has not been common afterwards (Figure 3).

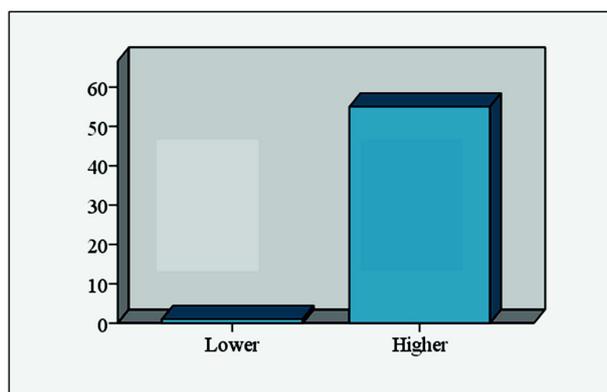


Figure 3. Are positions taken abroad higher or lower than in Hungary?

On average they spent 2.5 years abroad. Those with technical degrees achieved the highest position on average compared to people with economics, commerce or tourism degrees. Their

knowledge of the working language was good: a mean of 4.23 on a 5-point scale (Figure 4).

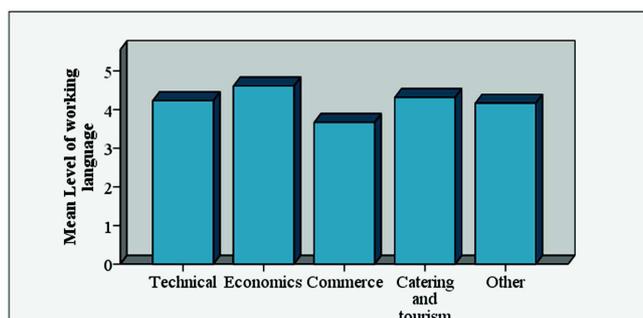


Figure 4. Language levels of people of different fields

Fewer people with technical backgrounds found jobs on their own: 27% compared to all respondents, of whom 66% were already working at the company who sent them abroad.

5. Conclusion

Young Hungarian people generally fare well abroad, especially those with a university degree. On average they spend at least 23 years in their chosen country, and get jobs in the same level as in Hungary or higher. They do not have significant problems communicating with colleagues in a different language. From the data examined, making the decision to move abroad has proved to be the right one, and most young expatriated Hungarians benefit from the experience gained from the adventure.

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