



ORIGINAL PAPER

Social Change, Migration and Work-Life Balance

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Abstract

In light of the recent data issued by the Romanian Institute of Statistics regarding Romanian emigration, we argue that the size and impact of this phenomenon on the various aspects of social life, especially the labor and family ones, are worth considering. The work-family balance is a theme increasingly often set on the table in the current sociological research, being given the extensive context of changes in the world, intensified when massive foreign emigration is engaged, such as the current situation in Romania. The aim of this paper is to analyze the ways in which international migration and the work-family balance are interconnected, by emphasizing the interlinks created and the ways social change affects them, as well as the reverse effect of these phenomena on the continuous process of social change.

Keywords: *social change; work-life balance; international migration; social effects.*

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Introduction

The particular social landscape caused by Romanian transition and the liberalization of population movement, generated by the accession to the European space, is defined by both positive and negative effects. The most important phenomenon, involved in most of the fields of activity, is the migration abroad, for work, of various demographic categories in Romania (Miftode, 2006: 3). The effects are numerous and different, some of them impacting on the subjective dimension of personalities, and others are objective, following the pattern of transition towards a different type of civilization and intra-societal relations.

The Romanian society was not ready to support the shock of international migration without risks. Among the social consequences of these significant population migratory flows we recall: the effect on families as most affected institution, as, the migration of usually one of the spouses leads to a deterioration of the family links, and, thus, the functionality of the core-group in society; children are highly affected both within the family, as well as regarding their status at school, public perception, and emotional well-being. Such effects will mirror later on the social functioning of individuals.

International human migration represents, by itself, a form of change in the society: when individuals migrate, they change not only their residence and work place, but also their behavior, the rules they obey, the institutions they refer to, and, most important, the type of relationships they engage into. The effects of these individual changes become, in time, obvious in the entire community they belong to, affecting both the members of the host community and the ones left at home. Although perceived as a means to evolution, granting access to a better life, some of the effects of migration, especially in the field of private life, can imply suffering and misbalance.

Despite the fact that each of the concepts under scrutiny may represent different study topics, we aim at creating a correlation between them. Regarding the scientific approach, we propose a conceptual frame in which the two phenomena under discussion, work-life balance and emigration can be analyzed, and by referring to the social effects of migration, based on a series of statistical data issued by the Romanian institutions, we will highlight its effects on the work-family balance. Furthermore, we aim at creating a correlation between the information presented for each of these elements in order to design study perspectives meant at better understanding the ways in which social change occurs through migration.

Furthermore, a closer study of the effects that international population movement has on the families of the migrants reveals the importance of the social networks that connect the migrants to their families, thus creating informal bridges between their origin and destination areas. Migrant networks are, as Massey defines them, “sets of interpersonal ties that link migrants, former migrants and non-migrants in origin and destination areas through the bonds of kinship, friendship and shared community origin” (Massey, 1988: 396). The importance of these networks resides in the fact that they lower the costs of migration, both the financial and the psychological ones: migration networks work both ways, on the one hand, granting simplified access to a new country, and, on the other hand, facilitating communication with those left at home. And this second aspect, despite being less tackled in the specialized literature, is the one that empowers migrants to acquire a better balance between their work environment and their private lives. In fact, as some studies reveal, “these networks are conduits through which influences flow back from the destination to the origin and

impinge upon the family. These influences can be carried back by the migrants themselves when they return periodically or permanently to the origin, or they can flow back to the origin through letters, phone calls and other means” (Hugo, 2002: 20).

Social Change

Several sociological studies have been dedicated to explaining the meaning of social change and how it occurs, applying various sets of theories to different fields of study, including political science, economics, international relations, and especially sociology. According to Encyclopedia Britannica, “Social change, in sociology, represents the alteration of mechanisms within the social structure, characterized by changes in cultural symbols, rules of behavior, social organizations, or value systems”. Social change can be analyzed taking into consideration two dimensions: “the hard one”, including processes such as inflation, migration, unemployment and “the soft dimension”, characterized by discrete aspects, such as mentalities, values or perceptions.

Most researchers that analyze social change speak about human development, seeing it as a path of evolution from traditional societies to modern ones and postmodern societies. From a theoretical perspective, we must say that social change can be conceptualized using two main categories of perspectives: the systemic theories and the processual or dynamic ones, built around the concept of “agentivity”.

When analyzing the effects of change, we can classify them into positive and negative ones. We can thus mention the so called “state of welfare”, where medical services are up to date, hunger and poverty are eradicated. Some authors speak about “risk society” (Beck, 1992) or “spiritual decrease” (Bădescu, 2011).

Among the characteristics of social change, as a process, scholars, such as Portes, include the idea that, just like the effects of migration, the “effects of social change are similarly diverse. They can be organized in a hierarchy of “micro-processes” affecting individuals and their immediate surroundings; “meso-processes” affecting entire communities and regions; and “macro-processes” affecting full societies and even the global system” (Portes, 2010: 1540). As long as migration does not occur as an immense population movement, it is unlikely for it to cause social change at global level. But, the little alterations of identity and habits inherent to this kind of process do contribute to the transformation of societies.

The systemic changes that occur in a society at a given time usually result in transformations that affect all the sectors of life. The Romanian Revolution from 1989 was such an event that brought many changes, affecting severely the workforce – over 10 million persons suffered between 1989 and 1999 from unemployment, layoffs, change of career path, forced retirement (Abraham, 2000). These type of situations were identified in most of the migration studies as push factors, building along to the decision of leaving the community of origin in seek of a better life. Therefore, such economic facts determined many Romanians to leave the country, searching for better financial opportunities. Migration, as a form of protest and abandon, may be considered a strategy for facing social change (Voicu, 2005).

International migration

Migration is a widely discussed phenomenon in different societies and represents the focus of numerous academic debates. Though many studies tackle the causes of this process and the origins of such decision, our aim is to analyze the effects of migration on the balance between work and family life. “Several sides of human life

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come to be affected by such consequences, involving the realms of social life, religion, culture, economy, and politics. These effects necessarily occur in two locations: at the starting point of migration, wherefrom the possible migrants are held to leave, and at the destination point” (Porumbescu, 2013: 189). Therefore, it is important, first of all, to examine the dimension of the migratory flows and to compare their evolution. The data provided by the National Institute of Statistics in Romania reveals the size of this phenomenon, and allows us to compare the evolution of the number of people who decided to emigrate, either temporary or permanently, differentiated by the criteria of gender. The gender of the migrant is of high importance in the work-family life balance rhetoric, as, in most of the Romanian families, the roles assumed by each of the members of the family is well defined. In this context, for example, a mother leaving for work in another country will pass on her traditional household duties to one of the remaining members of the family, the husband, or even to one of the children. Furthermore, several aspects of the personal life of the migrant are likely to be influenced by criteria such as gender.

In order to better understand the significance of the numbers presented, it is important to define the terms in the meaning that this institutions uses them, and to present the data collecting methods used. According to the National Institute of Statistics, “temporary emigrants” regards the persons who emigrate outside the national borders for at least 12 months. *Emigration* defines the action by which a person, who previously had a regular residence in Romania, stops residing on this territory for a period of time that is or is expected to be of at least 12 months. The Romanian domicile of a person is the address where he/she declares to live, as registered in the Identity Card, and stated in the evidences of the national administrative institutions.

Regarding the methods used to estimate the migrant flows by the Romanian National Institute of Statistics, they consist in getting together and correlating information produced by data sources. The data regarding the emigration and immigration flows were estimated based on several data sources, the main ones being: the data provided by the national institutes of statistics in Italy and Spain, the “mirrored” statistics regarding international migration – Romanian immigrants declared by the other states which are labeled as “emigrants” in the Romanian statistics and the other way round – and the data provided by national institutions – such as the number of immigrants reported by the General Inspectorate for Immigration.

As shown in the tables bellow, a close examination of the figures that describe temporary and permanent emigration from Romania reveals the fact that most of such movement is non-permanent and, in many cases, it can be presumed that it involves the separation of husband and wife. Such separation, even if for a determined amount of time, results in changes that usually affect the entire family. Children are often left in the care of a single parent, or in most unfortunate cases, with other members of the extended family who cannot guarantee the same kind of emotional and educational climate as a normal family. Therefore, entire generations are faced with the daily reality of missing parents, either by personal experience or by acknowledging those of their friends and colleagues. This inherently leads to building new social and institutional mechanisms meant to help children and youngsters cope with these absences.

Romanian emigration boosted immediately after 2007, along with the newly acquired freedom of movement, as now citizens could search better employment in other European states and return home more easily. Regarding temporary emigration, the year 2010 brought along a decrease in the number emigration, mainly due to the

diminishment of the effects of the economic crisis on the internal economy. During the previous years, during “the economic crisis, population’s income has severely decreased, because of the fact that unemployment rate was increasing. Also, public and private sectors encountered severe pay cuts and also a severe decrease of job vacancies” (Motoi, Gheorghiuță, 2017: 38). This created the perfect economic environment for emigration decisions to be made. But the decrease only lasted for a couple of years, as, starting with the year 2015, the numbers exceeded one hundred thousand emigrants per year again.

The temporary migrants are the ones that impact most on the social changes, especially in their home communities. The type of circulatory migration they perform enables them to circulate different kind of external influences, thus proposing and promoting change back at home. Romanians working abroad usually return with new cars, new consumption habits, new ideas regarding education and raising children, different approaches to gender roles, and the social behavior of imitation allows the multiplication of these models. It is, however, difficult if not impossible to estimate the impact they may have in their destination communities, as the most documented type of behavior is that of adaption, with Romanians taking over the foreign examples, rather than vice versa.

Table 1. Temporary emigration from Romania (2008-2016)

<i>Year</i>	Male	Female	Total
2008	151 164	151 632	302 796
2009	105 778	140 848	246 626
2010	85 663	112 322	197 985
2011	87 389	108 162	195 551
2012	70 163	100 023	170 186
2013	65 303	96 452	161 755
2014	87 356	85 515	172 871
2015	104 700	90 018	194 718
2016	100 533	107 045	207 578
2017	111 662	107 665	219 327

*Data collected from the Romanian National Institute of Statistics
(<http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/#/pages/tables/insse-table>)*

If in the case of temporary emigrants the situation was somehow stable, the situation of permanent emigration is completely different. The data presented in Table 2 reveal an increasing trend in the permanent emigration from Romania, the total numbers for the year 2017 being almost triple the ones for the year 2008. So, in less than ten years, more than 150 000 Romanians, about the size of a medium Romanian city, have decided to leave the country with no intention of returning. Another aspect noticed by analyzing these data is that the percent of female citizens emigrating is constantly larger throughout the years than the percent of male citizens, a situation that impacts on the evolution of the work-life balance. On the one hand, one must regard the effects on the family members left at home, who now need to deal with the absence of one of the members and undertake their roles, including, in the case of women migrants, those of mothering, taking care of the household, and even the elders in many situations. On the other hand, the process of integration in the host communities is often recalled as difficult and time consuming, thus leading to a certain delay or even cancellation of

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personal life related plans, such as getting married, starting a family or having children. All these effects of international migration result in adding more pressure to the already precarious balance between the work-related environment and the private life.

Table 2. Permanent emigration from Romania (2008-2017)

<i>Year</i>	Male	Female	Total
2008	3069	5 670	8 739
2009	3 768	6 443	10 211
2010	2 917	4 989	7 906
2011	8 527	9 780	18 307
2012	8 174	9 827	18 001
2013	8 526	10 530	19 056
2014	4 776	6 475	11 251
2015	6 521	8 714	15 235
2016	10 007	12 800	22 807
2017	10 198	12 958	23 156

*Data collected from the Romanian National Institute of Statistics
(<http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/#/pages/tables/insse-table>)*

The general trends in international migration are often influenced by factors that take places at a macro social level. In the case of Romania, 2007 was the year of Romania's accession to the European Union, the relaxation of legal conditions attached to the act of migration representing a push-factor for many. In addition to this, the economic crisis affected the Romanian economy deeper starting with the year 2008. Therefore, the numbers for this year and the next are slightly bigger than the next ones in the matter of temporary migration. However, long-term decisions such as permanent emigration are usually based on an internal negotiation that takes into account several aspects of life, such as the political system, the educational facilities, the healthcare services etc. Based on this assumption, we can argue that the obvious growth in the total amount of Romanian permanent emigrants (from eight thousand in 2008 to twenty three thousand in 2017, almost three times more) is less due to financial factors, but more likely to the evolution general life conditions in Romania.

Moreover, the individual process of migration is often a difficult and challenging one. In such an emigrational context, the emigrant finds himself in the position of leaving the culture he originated in, and facing the need to integrate himself into a new culture. The process of integration is often described by migrants as being a rather difficult and time-consuming one, experiencing a certain degree of identity alteration and reconstruction. It is undeniable that such transformations have the capacity to induct changes in the life of a person, changes that are replicated, on a larger scale, in the communities the migrant belongs to.

Migration is, by itself, deeply involved with the processes of social change. "As a cause of change, migration has been analyzed from a cultural perspective that emphasizes its potential for value/normative transformation and from a structural perspective that highlights its demographic and economic significance" (Portes, 2010: 1549). Based on this type of argumentation, several migration studies performed in Romanian communities reveal common features regarding social evolution. For instance, Anghel concludes that, in many places of origin, "the local economy

dependents on the migrants' financial remittances; significant differences appear between the migrants and the non-migrants, the families of the migrants having more money than the others; a strong effect of social transformation occurs, throughout the changes inside the families, by rearranging the social layers and by building consumption models associated to migration" (Anghel, 2009: 261).

Work-life balance

When speaking about private life and work demands, especially for women, first studies emphasized the negative relation of the two domains, through phrases such as "work-family conflict" or "work-life negative spillover". Individuals, both women and men nowadays, consider themselves affected by the work-family or family-work conflict. This concept was first used to define the conflict "produced by simultaneous pressures from work and family roles that are mutually incompatible" (Greenhaus, 1985: 76-88).

A lot of factors from both working environment and family sphere can contribute to the appearance of work-family conflict. Numerous researches found certain demographic conditions that have the potential to cause strain and pressure for employees, such as the number of children, lack of family support (from the partner, other relatives, friends, colleagues or superiors), taking care of elders or dependent relatives, housekeeping, for example. Subjective conditions, among which we can mention low levels of support between the two partners, emotional problems between family members, are sources of causing conflict from the family sphere. Working environment can also bring problems that affect this balance, through role ambiguity, overloading, long working hours, problematic relationships with colleagues or superiors, over qualification, redundant tasks.

The imbalance between work and family life produces undesired effects at three levels: time, tension and behavior. Researchers speak about time-based work-family conflict when the time necessary for achieving a role makes it difficult accomplishing the requests of the other role, while when the stress born from one role affects the performance of the other one, people are confronted with tension-based imbalance. (Friedman and Greenhaus, 2000: 76-88). We can also identify behavioral conflict, when the behavior required by one of the roles becomes an impediment in performing the other.

Individuals make choices depending on their values, preferences, socio-cultural unwritten norms or inherited behavioral patterns. All these factors influence peoples' decisions of time allocation to personal versus professional activities, engagement and expected behaviors.

The socio-professional status, manifested by income level and education level, ensures access to a certain type of care, to a more or less satisfactory category of services. In addition, it is known that those with higher education also have greater material resources. So, we can say that education can be a key to access better jobs, high quality care services for children or elder relatives with health problems or financial resources to hire help for house chores, such as cleaning, cooking, gardening, for example. These aspects are of main importance when we speak about work-family balance, because previous studies have shown that support, both instrumental and emotional, is very important in balancing the two domains (Friedman and Greenhaus, 2000). Also, good day care centers for children are considered a satisfactory solution that allows mothers to return faster at work and if the conditions in such centers are

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good, the risk of the little ones to get sick decreases, and therefore work absenteeism decreases. Some companies even include in their family-friendly policies such facilities, as in-house kinder garden or subventions for paying such external services.

Many Romanians choose to migrate hoping that other countries will manage to meet their needs, providing better services than their country of origin. On the other hand, the chances of left at home children to have a proper education are questionable.

Professor Greenhaus, a researcher who constantly analyzed the work-family relationship, considers that the individual is the most important part of this balance, inviting everyone to anticipate or at least acknowledge the results of their behavior or attitudes (Greenhaus, Stoeva and Chiu, 2002). This perspective is based on studies that analyzed the impact that specific personality characteristics have on the way that each person manages the two main life domains – personal and professional life.

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Accelerated social changes have led to new settlements of the traditional roles of women and men, even if we discuss about family relation or professional status. In addition, the working environment is often characterized by a constant state of job-hunting and employee-hunting, employers ask from their workers multiple and transferable skills, availability for work under time pressure for most part of the work program and fierce competition is a feature of almost all sectors, so that the job for life, until retirement, is no longer much of a current.

The desire to have a successful career, otherwise natural, may be the expression on the one hand of the individuals' personal wish to assert their own values, or the need to overcome financial hardship in many cases, especially in poorer areas, as unfortunately it is the case of our country. It should also be noted that work is one of the basic activities, necessary in the life of a healthy adult (physically, mentally and socially, as "health" is defined by the World Health Organization), with multiple benefic effects, not only the material ones, when conducted in a reasonable way. Labor relations, working environment, challenges of solving various tasks are as many ways and opportunities for building a social identity and a healthy self-image.

But we can also talk about a manifestation of the culture of individualism without limits in the light of Fukuyama's findings, when the need to work is pathologically exacerbated, we might say, not only to purchase the minimum resources for subsistence, but to bring other psychological benefits for the individual (recognition of self-worth, self-affirmation, confirmation of potential) - cases of workaholism. It is assumed that this channeling of all the resources for the professional sector will lead to a deficit in personal life, the appearance of health problems or deterioration of relations that often, after a period, also reflect on the optimal functioning of the individual in the organization (Grzywacz and Marks, 2000a).

In countries where for a large part of the inhabitants their number one problem is the economic survival, this lesser involvement in family life is seen as a given, not the will of the individual, because his professional involvement is considered a sacrifice of the employee, who is working to ensure a decent living for the family who supports him. This is about cultural factors, in Hofstede's terminology, as moderators of perception of a balance or imbalance between private and professional life.

In the situations when these needs and desires- be them mere survival or social recognition- cannot be met in the labor market of the country they belong to, more and more people make the decision to emigrate, in search for a new and better life, especially

in professional terms. As shown before, the effect of such decision in the personal life of the individual can, and often does, result in imbalance, frustrations, and a strong need to return to the environment the subject is familiar to.

However, international migration can also positively impact not only the professional but also the personal lives of those involved, and, therefore, benefit the relationship between these instances. In the globalized world we live in, longer distances are easily travelled, communication is almost instant, and positive examples and better life and time-management skills acquired in a foreign community can be replicated in the home communities. These effects are most often noticed in the high-skilled migrants categories, due to the fact that “in absolute values, the migration rate for highly qualified people has increased, owing, on one hand, to a higher level of education in the countries of origin, and, on the other hand, to better infrastructure, to improved transportation and to the development of international organizations and state connections” (Goga, Ilie, 2017: 93).

Alert changes of the recent years also affect the work environment, its contents, the structure of conjugal roles, family and social capital. Thus, the 8 hours working schedule is no longer a constant; development of modern communication techniques and remote transmission of information facilitates permanent connection to work, which inevitably brings both advantages and disadvantages. In addition, the traditional "life job", until retirement, is missing or is increasingly less common in the current economic environment, characterized by instability and uncertainty.

Labor contents have also changed, employers often requiring adaptability, ability to work overtime and with deadlines, multiple skills, transferable, besides expertise, technical knowledge, specific to a certain occupation.

When analyzing family relationships, is remarkable the shift from the traditional role of men as breadwinner of the family, to couples where both partners produce income and single-parent families. Some researchers talk about poor division of roles in the modern family, caused mainly by the inclusion of women in working life. It was also noted that the structure of conjugal roles is conditioned by the instructional and cultural background of the partners, the socio-professional category they belong to, outer relations of the conjugal core with extended family, friends, neighbors and other close (Grzywacz and Marks, 2000b: 125).

Furthermore, migration is one of the major changes that can occur in one's life, affecting the economic sector but also his/her private life. Family is often the most affected institution by migration, given that the migration of usually one of the spouses leads to a deterioration of the family connections. Statistics show that in many cases “migrant workers undertake much of the service sector work, which makes others work-life balance possible and yet their own work-life balance negotiations are often neglected” (McDowell and Batnitzki, 2011: 685).

Migration often favors changing mentalities and reconsidering gender-related prescriptions. One particular consequence of migration affects children remaining at home. The National Authority for Children Rights and Adoption shows that over 80.000 Romanian children need psychological, social and educational support, as their parents work in other countries. Starting from their emotional well-being, self-esteem, to public perception and status, both in school and other social circumstances, the functioning of these children is highly and permanently affected by their parent's absence.

In these cases, delinquent behaviors tend to occur more often, as grandparents or the parent left at home are confronted with lack of authority, being incapable to

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control the children. Negative situations such as school failure, drug or alcohol consumption, criminal acts are reported. Such facts contribute to growing tensions among family members and in many cases divorce.

The above-mentioned issues affect not only personal and family life, but will also have a negative impact, in most cases, on the working behavior of the person. As many of the studies argue, in such situations we can speak about a negative spill-over between the two domains.

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