

## LABOUR MARKET INSERTION OF SOCIAL WORK ALUMNI IN ROMANIA

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**Abstract:** The social work domain is part of a continually changing and challenging global world and new solutions and improvements are needed as should happen in any evolving domain. The main aim of the current exploratory study was to highlight the insertion of the labour market of seven years of promotion alumni on social work from one university founded in 1990, that organizes Bachelor's Degree studies in social work and is localized in the North-East area of Romania. We used a quantitative method (questionnaire on alumni in social work) with mixed questions (closed and open ones) that provided us the means to be able to conclude that the internships and the employment rate exist due to strong community partnerships between the university and local organizations that are active in the social work domain.

This exploratory study can represent the early foundation for a sustainable image of employment and a research contribution to the social work system in Romania. According to our exploratory study results from the 174 respondents, 121 were already in the labour market during their university studies and immediately after graduation. Of the 121 respondents, 42 work in the social work system with different executive or leading attributions in public or private entities from local and national levels.

The final results helped us present the three main categories of workforce among social work alumni: social workers, specialists in other domains (not related to the social work domain), and teaching staff. They also concluded that re-qualification is frequently encountered among the options of specialists who have chosen to become social work students over the years.

**Keywords:** students; social work; labour market; career; graduate; social capital; partnership; development; Romania

**Résumé :** Le domaine du travail social fait partie d'un monde mondial en constante évolution et difficile et de nouvelles solutions et améliorations sont nécessaires, comme cela devrait se produire dans tout domaine en évolution. L'objectif principal de la présente étude exploratoire était de mettre en évidence l'insertion sur le marché du travail actuel d'anciens élèves de sept années de promotion en travail social d'une université fondée en 1990, qui organise des études de licence en travail social et est localisée dans le Nord-Est. région de la Roumanie. Nous avons utilisé une méthode quantitative (questionnaire auprès des anciens élèves en travail social) avec des questions mixtes (fermées et ouvertes) qui nous

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ont donné les moyens de pouvoir conclure que les stages et le taux d'emploi existent grâce à de forts partenariats communautaires entre l'université et organisations locales actives dans le domaine du travail social.

Cette étude exploratoire peut représenter la première base d'une image durable de l'emploi et une contribution de la recherche au système de travail social de Roumanie. Selon les résultats de notre étude exploratoire auprès des 174 répondants, 121 sont déjà sur le marché du travail pendant leurs études universitaires et immédiatement après l'obtention de leur diplôme. Sur les 121 répondants, 42 travaillent dans le système du travail social avec différentes attributions de direction ou de direction, dans des entités publiques ou privées au niveau local et national.

Les résultats finaux nous ont permis de présenter les trois principales catégories de main-d'œuvre parmi les anciens élèves du travail social : travailleur social, spécialiste dans d'autres domaines (non liés au domaine du travail social) et personnel enseignant. Et aussi de conclure que la requalification est fréquente parmi les options des spécialistes qui ont choisi de devenir étudiants en travail social au fil des années.

**Mots-clés :** étudiants; travail social; marché du travail; carrière; diplômé; capital social; partenariat; développement; Roumanie

**Rezumat:** Domeniul asistenței sociale este parte din lumea globală aflată în continuă schimbare provocatoare, iar noi soluții și îmbunătățiri sunt necesare așa cum ar trebui să se întâmple în orice domeniu științific în evoluție. Scopul principal al prezentului studiu exploratoriu a fost acela de a evidenția inserția pe piața forței de muncă a șapte promoții de absolvenți în asistență socială dintr-o universitate înființată în 1990, care organizează studii de licență în domeniu și este localizată în zona de Nord-Est a României. Am folosit o metodă cantitativă (chestionar privind absolvenții în asistență socială) cu întrebări mixte (închise și deschise) care ne-a oferit mijloacele de a putea concluziona că există o corelație între stagiile de practică din timpul facultății și rata de angajare ridicată datorită parteneriatelor comunitare puternice între universități și organizațiile care sunt active în domeniul asistenței sociale.

Acest studiu exploratoriu poate reprezenta fundamentul timpuriu pentru o imagine durabilă a angajării absolvenților și contribuție la cercetare la sistemul de asistență socială din România. Conform rezultatelor studiului nostru exploratoriu din cei 174 de respondenți, 121 sunt deja pe piața muncii în timpul studiilor universitare și imediat după absolvire. Din cei 121 de respondenți, 42 lucrează în sistemul de asistență socială cu diferite atribuții executive sau de conducere, în entități publice sau private de la nivel local și național.

Rezultatele finale ne-au ajutat să prezentăm cele trei categorii principale de forță de muncă în rândul absolvenților de asistență socială: asistent social, specialist în alte domenii (care nu are legătură cu domeniul asistenței sociale) și personal didactic. Și, de asemenea, să concluzionăm că recalificarea se întâlnește frecvent printre opțiunile specialiștilor care au ales să devină studenți la asistență socială de-a lungul anilor.

**Cuvinte cheie:** student; asistență socială; piața muncii; carieră; absolvent; capital social; partenariat; dezvoltare; România

## 1. Introduction

Social work in Romania dates from 300 years and it is mainly associated with the involvement of churches and monasteries in helping the persons in need.

The main beneficiaries, that the social work system from that period focused on, were mainly oriented on children, mothers, elderly persons, and disabled persons. Unfortunately, in Romania during the period of communism, social work did not exist at all, because the main doctrine of communism was that we are all equals and everybody gets what needs to be correlated for their daily necessities and there is no need for social work. As seen in different documentaries released after 1990 through television, at that period disabled children were kept in foster care centers in miserable conditions because the regime did not accept this as an issue that existed in the society. Social work at that time was absent and it has fallen into a latent stage.

Romania is 35 years after the fall of communism. Nowadays, social work in Romania has managed to evolve and each day tries to become more performant first by creating and updating the legal framework for preparing specialists in the social work domain (undergraduates) and, after that, for insertion into the labour market properly. For example, after the communist period, there were many local city halls where they hired social workers with middle studies and no qualification in the social work domain had to do the social work duties. Also, in the former legislation there was a mention that in this domain can be active „social workers, other specialized staff in social work, as well as staff with various professions, qualifications and skills” according to article 121, alin.1. (Law No. 292/2011 on social assistance). This small gap allowed executives from the social work domain and decision actors to also hire different specialists instead of qualified social workers with no Bachelor Degree in the domain. Until recently the mayors explained that they had no qualified social workers to fill in those positions so they hired other specialists. In the last ten years, because more alumni in social work emerged each year this need has found its solution, and qualified personnel exist and it is easier to be found and inserted into the labour market. This way, we can state that the human resources and its quality improved over time, at least from this point of view. Even though social work has (re)borne after the communist period, important steps were made at the national level to create and develop a suitable and sustainable local development for the actors involved in this system, namely: universities, public and private sector, stakeholders, students, local community etc.

Many national specialists studied the different stages of the evolution of social work in Romania (Szabó, 2020; Buzducea, 2008; Lazăr et al., 2019). All the papers present the different stages of the evolution of social work from Romania and the fact that they are trying to reach a higher level similar to the traditional system of social work from countries such as the United States of America, Poland, Spain, Italy, Norway, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

Despite international analyses proposing reforms of social work systems that could be closely linked to social health (Andrews et al., 2019; Andrews et al., 2016), each country pursues its means of development according to its national specifics and available human resources.

The first steps for national regulations in Romania in the social work domain were made in 2004 when it was issued *Law No. 466 of 2004 on the status of the social worker*. This law regulates the rights and obligations of social workers who work in Romania, their activities, continuing lifelong specialization, incompatibilities, prohibitions, ethical principles, etc. (Law no. 466 of 2004 on the status of the social worker, 2004).

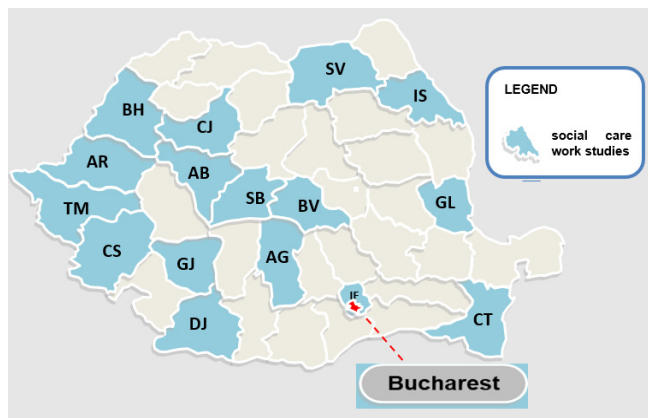
Also, in 2001 was issued *Law no. 705 of December 3, 2001, regarding the national social assistance system*, followed by *Law no. 47 of March 8, 2006, regarding the national social assistance system*, and *Law no. 292 social assistance from December 20, 2011*, that is continuously updated and exists in present days. This law provides the legal framework for: values and principles that govern the domain; definitions and terms used in the systems; types of beneficiaries; types of social services; types of social benefits; minimum conditions fulfilled to be granted; entities that can provide social services; sources of funding the entities from the system; ethics and conduct; and, human resources and their management (Law No. 292/2011 on social assistance).

And, in 2012 with *the Law no. 197 regarding quality assurance in the field of social services from November 1, 2012 (\*updated\*)* which stipulates conditions that must be fulfilled for national qualitative social services that can be provided for our social work beneficiaries (Law no. 197 regarding quality assurance in the field of social services from November 1, 2012 (\*updated\*), 2012). Many other special laws, for different categories of social beneficiaries are issued and updated according to the necessities of the social work system. For example, *Law no. 219 on social economy* and all its updates to fill the national regulations in this domain (Law no. 219, on the social economy, 2015).

Secondly, after national regulations, steps were made in the direction of establishing national universities for teaching social work specialists that will perform lately on the labour market in the domain and also will develop new regulations on different topics according to society's challenges. In Romania, according to the annual decisions for the modification of annexes no. 1-6 of the Government Decision regarding the approval of the Domain Nomenclature and specializations/programs of university studies and the structure of higher education institutions for each academic year and, also the *Law of Higher Education no. 199/2023* focusing the enrolment to social work studies in Romania are available for the universities that have authorized Bachelor Degrees programs in this domain (Law no. 199 The Higher Education, 2023). For example, for the academic year 2022-2023, was issued Decision 433 from 2022 23 universities were authorized to register students in the social work domain in the Bachelor's Degree program.

Following Article 32 of the Romanian Constitution university studies are free of charge (The Romanian Constitution, n.d.). As we can see in **Figure No. 1** below in Romania some universities prepare future social workers for the labour market field in the next counties: Timișoara, Arad, Bihor, Cluj-Napoca, Caraș-Severin, Dolj, Gorj, Argeș, Sibiu, Brașov, Constanța, Galați, Iași, Suceava, Bucharest. It can easily be noticed that there is more concentration in the North-

West, West-South, and Centre of the country with different types of universities which produce a larger number of alumni in the social work domain. In the North-East Area, there are only two counties: Suceava and Iași, with three universities that have alumni from the social work domain: University 'Alexandru Ioan Cuza' from Iași, University 'Petre Andrei' from Iași and University 'Stefan cel Mare' of Suceava.



**Figure 1.** Distribution of universities in Romania where are enrolled students in social work studies

Source: created by the author

Universities have an important role in transmitting and developing new principles for an internal cultural habitus (Bourdieu, 1980) that exists after graduation and can contribute to local community development (Bagherianfar & Dolati, 2022) as future employers in their domain of study. For example, each alumnus of social work that is inserted into the labour market in city halls from different counties in Romania, where previously there was no hired social worker, has its specialist previous experience obtained during internship, volunteer period, or experience exchange as a student, and it brings his/her know-how. Also, adapts his/her expertise to current situations, finds proper solutions, engages the community members, and establishes pillars among local actors and stakeholders' involving all of them for the same common objective: community development all along with its advantages and possibilities.

## 2. Theoretical framework

Choosing a career path in the domain of social work may have its roots in the personal previous life experience and goals (Rogošić & Baranović, 2016), existing social capital, and the way you want to participate in the community development around you (Gubbins et al., 2018) and the way you are 'shaping the service triangle and navigating stakeholder interests within this' (Vermeerbergen et al., 2021). The effects towards community development and intervention are

influenced by the type of organization you are a part of `order-based or functional` (Pless et al., 2015), governmental or non-governmental one.

For example, governmental institutions such as the General Directorate of Social Work and Child Protection, Directorate of Social Assistance, and Probation Service implement the national regulation at the local level in each county where they are located and have a wider area of intervention for different social categories of beneficiaries in the same time frame. Another advantage is that the budget for the activities is provided by the designated ministry (finance or labour) or reimbursement funds through different approved projects. There is also the possibility to request a budget supplement if needed.

On the other hand, when you work as a social worker, volunteer, or internship in a non-governmental entity the budget is limited because it comes only from projects that you implement and are focusing only on different specific beneficiaries such as abused children and their families. There is no possibility of requesting a budget supplement, you have to adjust all in the initial project budget. A solution can be to submit another project with sustainable activities and to be a flow-up for the initial one.

But, to both types of organizations, governmental or non-governmental or order-based or functional, the efficiency of the intervention at the community level is related to public and private partnerships. They join in different projects implicating their specialists for the mutual objective defined mainly by community development in the area where they are located. As a final possible result, if they manage to collaborate better for an improved lifestyle for the people in the community also their activities would be easier to implement.

The Social Capital theory developed by James Samuel Coleman, Pierre Bourdieu, and Robert Putman combined with the Institutional Theory analysed by Pamela S. Tolbert and Lynne G. Zucker represents the base of our current exploratory study. We tried to identify and present the ways that local partnerships, social norms, current social networks, and previously existing community relationships and connections can contribute to engaging students and alumni in the labour market in the social work domain. Both theories, the social capital theory and the institutional theory contain different elements that are at the base of our exploratory study: people (e.g. students and alumni in social work, current specialists activating in the domain or convex one) and institutions existing in this domain (e.g. national, regional and local ones). The people and the institutions are permanently interconnected and the long-time created networks or new ones, partnerships, and connections from Suceava county and neighbourhood provide the places where information is shared and the interested actors take what they need for the mutual objective – community development (Miron, 2010), particularly in our case the insertion on the labour market of alumni from social work.

At the same time to be part of the local development of the society and to have a high percentage of employment among alumni. As Silvia Rogošić mentions that `social capital of the community can be used by individuals in an attempt to

achieve personal goals` (Rogošić & Baranović, 2016) such as employment in the study domain.

We were able to identify the forms of formal and informal social capital (Putnam, 2001) and the way that the nodes created provide reciprocity and contribute to community development and employment of alumni in the social work domain. For example, alumni of social work become current employees in local city halls, their original hometowns. Initially, there was a free position and no experts to apply and during their university studies they did their internships there and after graduation, they applied for the job and became a part of the organization. This way a mutual gain was obtained also for the community and the alumni. He/she was born in that community, knows its problems, and now can contribute with the expertise obtained during university courses and different other internship stages. Also, the way that Institutional Theory can contribute to engaging students and alumni to participate in local community development and employment.

The importance of higher education and employment is analysed in the scientific literature (Souto-Otero & Białowolski, 2021) where strong connections are revealed. Over time we were able to see that the institutional frames provided during university studies assures a rigorous base for future employers. Also, social norms and different actors' involvement from the community level are relevant to the organizational insights (Tolbert & Zucker, 2012) (Patriotta, 2020) that are carried out and implemented after employment.

In Romania, some regulations offer the opportunity for students to work during their university studies during holidays or with a reduced program and there are fiscal facilities for the employer (Law no. 72/2007 on stimulating the employment of pupils and students, 2007), or for internship stages (Law no. 335/2013 regarding the internship for higher education graduates, with subsequent changes, 2013), or apprenticeship at work (Law no. 279/2005 on apprenticeship at work, republished, with amendments and subsequent additions, 2005). All rights and duties regarding the unemployment insurance system and employment stimulation work are regulated by Law no. 76 from 2002 and all its updates (Law no. 76/2002 regarding the unemployment insurance system and employment stimulation work, with subsequent amendments and additions, 2002).

The option to work is decided by each person and this is conditioned by many factors, mainly mutual benefits, either for the alumni, for the beneficiary, or the institution. For example: `to enhance well-being and a positive employment relationship` (Guest, 2017), can represent an important element for an alumnus or a specialist, meaning that if you feel that your work is important and provides proper means for learning, performing, belonging and career evolution you are motivated to stay and build more in that team. Another mutual benefit may be to `improve the distribution of decent employment conditions` (Grimshaw et al., 2017) which can be interpreted as an opportunity for recent graduates on the labour market and more necessary for current generations to ensure their stability at their jobs. In strong correlation with the previous benefit, the `desire for work

autonomy` (Pulignano et al., 2021) is very important for our alumni who start their internships or jobs immediately after graduation. The work autonomy is relevant for them and gives in time the feeling of independence and confidence in their forces. Another relevant element is the appropriate leadership style (Mcdermott et al., 2013) which is important for all specialists. The social work domain also has the particularity that there are different approaches for the same problem, but different beneficiaries due to their particularities. The leadership style can contribute to proper community development by engaging each actor who is willing to participate and to empower each initiative that comes from the people and specialists.

I asked each alumni generation `What is the main reason or gain that they obtained during their internship period`? The answer to this question is focusing on `finding motivation in practice, looking back to go forward` (Harney & Collings, 2021) and contributing to social development in the area where they work. Because this domain is in permanent development and exchange and needs to be updated constantly, the students and the alumni have the opportunity to work with many different categories of beneficiaries, from children (with disabilities, abandoned, in foster families, beggars, abused, trafficked persons, delinquent, etc.), to adults also with different comorbidities, to elderly persons or to elaborate social policies, community development, programs, and projects implementation and so on. This way they can like or dislike, and embrace a certain area of interest in this domain, and this way he/she find motivation in what they do and in what they feel they contribute to society. Finally, but not least, all these benefits `still meet major challenges` (Szabo, 2014) because we are a changing and challenging global world, and new solutions and improvements are needed as should happen in any evolving domain. In the following part of the paper, we will present the research methodology of the current study.

### **3. Materials and Methods**

This article has focused on a quantitative method (questionnaire on alumni in social work) with mixed questions (closed and open ones). These methods helped us to create an image regarding the particularities of the social work system that is a part of the entire national social work system of Romania, mainly in the northeast area of the country. And, is also a good example of the employment of alumni in social work from one university founded in 1990, one of the many universities that organize Bachelor's Degree studies in social work and is localized in the North-East area of the country.

For the online questionnaire, we sent the link to the entire population of the seven years' cohort students who participated in the final exam and graduated from 2018 to 2024 at one university founded in 1990, one of the many universities that organize Bachelor's Degree studies in social work and is localized in the North-East area of Romania. There are 257 graduates (alumni) in the social work domain at this university that we choose. From the total number of populations, we received answers from 174 respondents, with a  $\pm 3.98\%$  margin of error, a



population percentage of 67%, and a confidence level of 95% were used in our current exploratory study. From all the respondents we asked for their informed consent before answering the questions of the survey. Participation in this study was voluntary and the anonymity of the answers was assured. Also, no financial or material rewards were given or asked from the respondents. We mention that the present research was conducted fulfilling the stipulations of national and international regulations and we assured the anonymity of the respondents. The statistical analysis of the answers received at the questionnaires was made with the statistical soft JASP 0.17.2.1 version offered in open-source by the University of Amsterdam.

Among respondents to our questionnaire, we were able to identify that there were different types of employability, such as:

- (1) alumni that work in the social work domain after the final exam, with an executive or coordinating tasks;
- (2) a person who has a job in a different field of study, such as sales, teaching staff, nursing, shift leader, etc.;
- (3) a person who, before enrolling the undergraduate studies in social work was working in the same domain as specialists with similar attributions, qualified with secondary education, and after graduation started to work in the domain;
- (4) graduate, who before enrolling the undergraduate studies in social work was working in different domains as specialists, and after graduation kept working in their domain;
- (5) alumni who do not work at all but choose to specialize themselves in the social work domain.

The main aim of the exploratory study was to present the situation of seven years' promotion alumni in the social work scientific domain from one university founded in 1990, organizes Bachelor's Degree studies in social work and is localized in the North-East area of Romania and their insertion on the actual labour market.

The research questions of the current exploratory study are:

- (1) There is a uniform distribution among the genders of alumni from the social work domain?
- (2) Which are the main categories for workforce distribution on domains of alumni from social work?
- (3) There is a connection between internships during undergraduate studies and working in the social work domain after graduation?
- (4) Is re-qualification the main idea encountered among the alumni in the social work domain?

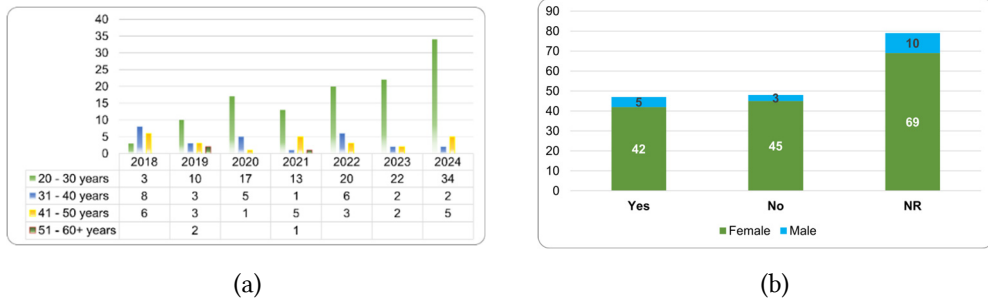
As an added value we must mention that scientific research for the seven years' analysis is relevant for a domain that is in its development stage in a country where the communist era left its marks.

#### 4. Results of the exploratory study

Regarding the social worker profile, the available scientific literature mentions that is a `woman, around 35 years old, graduated from university studies in the field and usually works in a public entity of social work` (Lazăr, 2015). Among the social workers are also men but in a more reduced number than women.

From the total number of respondents in our survey (N=174), the age of each promotion and gender on their current job status is shown in **Figure 2 (a)** and **(b)** below. The average age of the respondents is 30 years old; the lowest age is 20 years old and the highest age is 54 years old. Instead of gender distribution, we can easily notice that the female percentage is larger than the male one; from the 174 respondents, we have only 18 males (10%).

This can be justified in the context that people consider this job more suitable for a woman than for a man, so for this reason, the majority of the alumni and respondents are female. We must mention that there are sectors of this domain where male social workers are more appropriate for this activity. For example, in the men's prisons sector where we have probation counsellors and an advantage is that the social worker should be a male. Or, in a hospital for the mentally ill beneficiaries with bouts of anger and violence also a male social worker would be more recommended for the job.

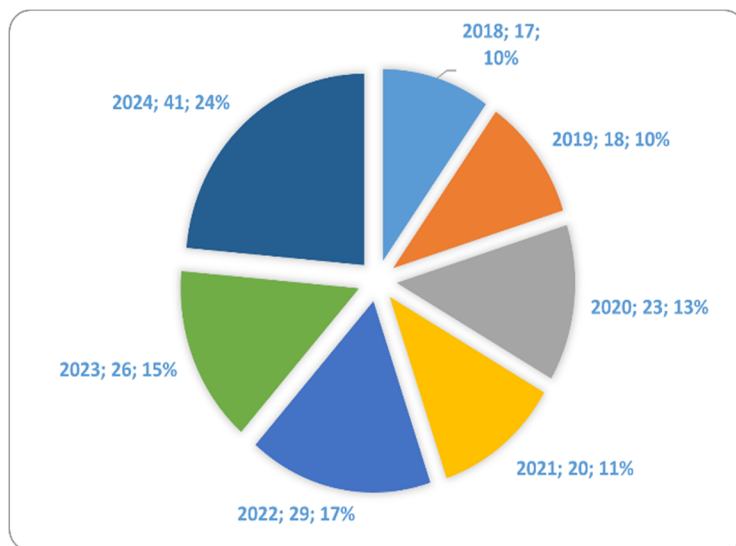


**Figure 2.** Describes the age and gender of respondents: (a) Age of respondents on each promotion; (b) Gender of respondents on current job status.

Source: created by the author

From the above **Figure 2 (a)** we can see that each analysed promotion has on the first rank the 20 – 30 years group and we can see that only in 2019 and 2021 promotions we had respondents with the 50 – 30+ years group. Also, from **Figure 2 (b)** we can notice that 27% (N=47) are currently working in their domain field. And 55% (N=95) are active in the labour market, even though they work in their domain or a different one. Notable is the fact that we had a large number of `NR` – `No response` from 45% (N=79) respondents. We can only assume that they were not interested in answering this question that it was easier for them to check this box or that their answer is not relevant.

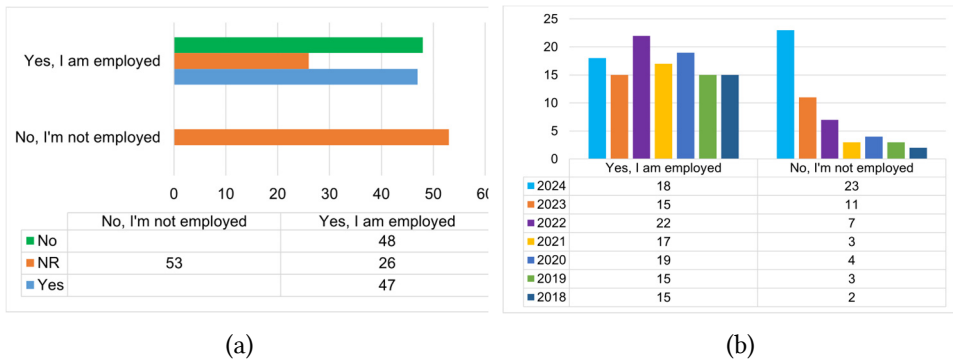
The distribution of the 174 respondents to the online questionnaire can be seen below, in **Figure 3**. A larger percentage (24%) of answers were received from the 2024 promotion of alumni, due to the fact that they were recently alumni and they were still close to the university. The 2018 and 2019 promotions have the smallest percentage (10%) in our research.



**Figure 3.** Distribution of each promotion of students/respondents  
Source: created by the author

As previously seen, one of the main items that were of interest to us was the status of the labour market at present for the alumni of the seven cohorts during this research. From the results, we managed to see that more than half of them were employed at that moment 70% (N=121). From this percentage, 47 persons (27%) are working in the social work system with different job descriptions 48 persons (28%) are actively involved in other domains of activity, and other 26 respondents (15%) are active in the labour market without telling us on what type of domain, as seen in **Figure 4 (a)**. From **Figure 4 (b)** below we can see that the current alumni promotion (2024) has the largest number of respondents who are not employed at this moment. The explanation can be because the majority of the alumni preferred to dedicate their time to study and after that to find a proper job. The respondents from the same promotion, 2024, that answered `Yes, I am employed` activate in different domains such as waitress/waiter, sales, temporary job, teaching staff, etc.

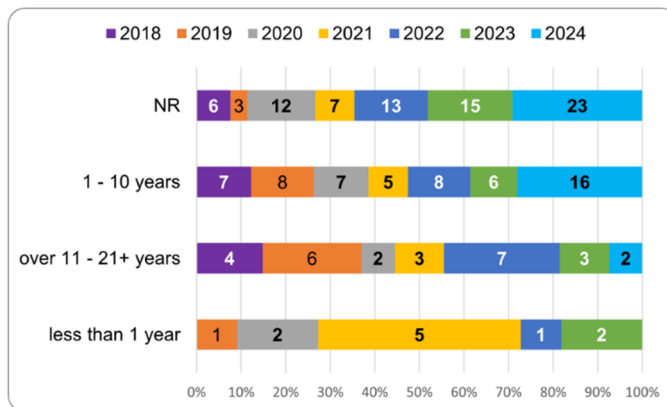
This percentage of 27% (N=47) is relevant to the fact that in the North-East Area of Romania and even in Suceava county there is a huge lack of specialists in the social work domain as can be seen in official statistics (*National Institute of Statistics*, n.d.) and also according to Ministry of labour from Romania (Min. of Labour, 2023) where there are presented the necessary social services for each county.



**Figure 4.** Describes the job status on the labour market and distribution of respondents:  
 (a) Job status on the labour market (employed/unemployed) at the moment;  
 (b) Distribution on each promotion of job status on the labour market (employed/unemployed) at the moment

Source: created by the author

For the current job status of alumni from the social work domain, we can see in **Figure 5** below that 57 persons (33%) have between 1 - and 10 years' experience, and 11 persons (6%) have less than 1 year. If we have a look at the distribution of answers on each cohort, we can notice that promotion 2019, 2022, and 2024 have the largest number of respondents that are employed at this time, namely 9% (N=15), 9% (N=16) and 10% (N=18). It is visible that the 2024 cohort answered in a percentage of 13% (N=23) that they prefer actually to not answer ('NR').



**Figure 5.** Experience in work field (how many years did they work until now)  
 Source: created by the author

Among the reasons that they mentioned for choosing this career path are: *'helping people in need'*, *'finding a purpose for themselves'*, *'contributing to the community'*, *'having a social work case in their neighbourhood/family'*, *'they felt the need for a change'*, *'they come from children's centers and the social worker*

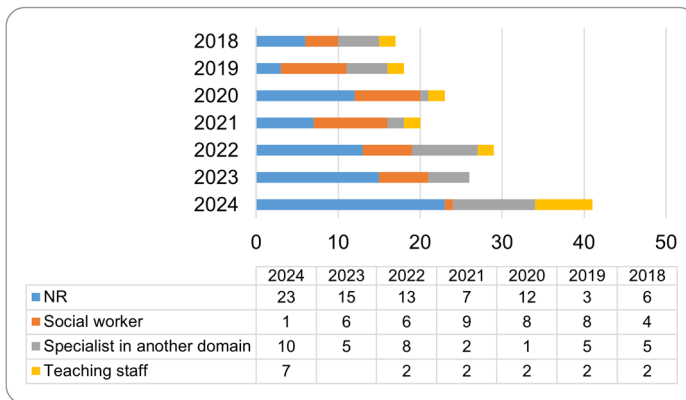
*influenced their life and they want to be a model as well`, `to show other social workers how a qualitative job is made (as a challenge)`.*

The workforce distribution on the domain can be seen in **Figure 6** below where we were able to identify three main categories of workforce among alumni of social work, namely: social worker - 24% (N=42), specialist in other domains (not related to the social work domain) – 21% (N=26) and teaching staff - 10% (N=17). We need to mention that the three categories that we extracted from the respondent's answers gather more detailed job descriptions encountered at the national level.

For example, `social workers` includes jobs in the social work domain such as therapist, intern, therapist for children with autism syndrome, probation counsellor, day center coordinator for elderly people, and specialist inspector. In this category, we also included the specialists who carry out activities of social work but do not have a Bachelor's Degree such as workers from local city/county hall (named `referent` in Romanian), community medical assistant which has attribution of social work at local level accordingly to national regulation (Methodological rules of May 23, 2019 regarding the organization, operation, and financing of the community healthcare activity, 2019).

For the category `teaching staff` we included here occupations from the elementary and pre-university personnel that activate as: assistant for kindergarten teacher, kindergarten teacher, teacher of math and mechanics, elementary teacher.

For the category `specialist in another domain,` we included persons who are active such as transport coordinators, administrators, recruitment specialists, sales advisors, counselling assistants, trade workers, call center operators, acquisition specialists, police personnel, HR inspectors, data processing operator, translator, nurse, shift leader.

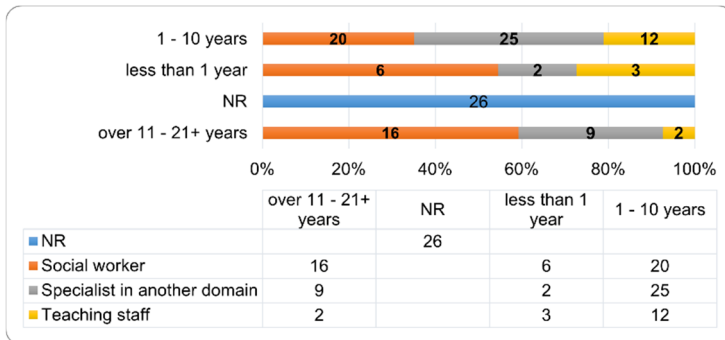


**Figure 6.** Main categories of workforce among alumni of social work  
Source: created by the author

Re-qualification is one of the main ideas that was encountered during our study. Both questions (closed and open answer ones) existing in the questionnaire

and their answers, highlighted the fact that respondents who worked in different domains chose this specialization to change their career path. Many respondents from the questionnaire mentioned that they had already been hired for over 1 year and currently have a job in the social work national system, as can be seen in **Figure 7** below. The actual national education system offers the opportunity for re-qualification (Szabó et al., 2022) if the specialists have this need. From the figure below we can see that the total number of specialists from another domain with experience in the labour market represents 26% (N=36) from the total number of respondents (N=174); and, teaching staff represent 8% (N=17). This is very significant because we can conclude that the social work profession is a viable one for re-qualification for persons from other domains and they bring their know-how from their previous jobs this way proper innovative solutions from multidisciplinary points of view are brought into this domain's attention and community development.

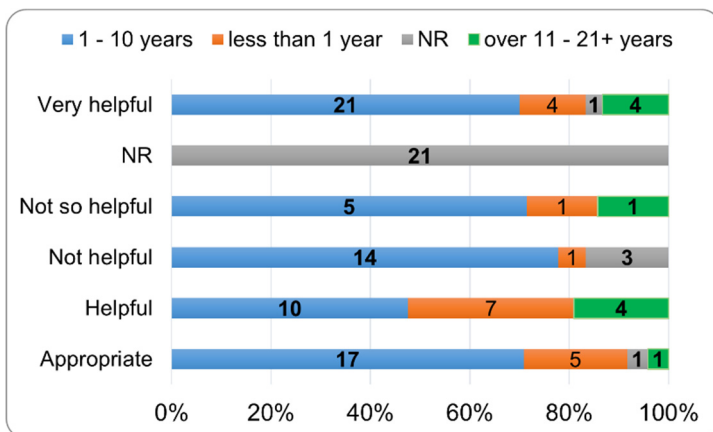
Another argument received from these respondents was that one of the main reasons why they chose this specialization (re-qualification) is that *‘during the last period of time I heard more about the opportunities given by this job and they want to re-qualify and change the career’* (Female, 35 years, working in another domain).



**Figure 7.** Comparing experience in the work field  
Source: created by the author

From the total number of respondents (N=174) we can state that for ‘social workers’ that found a job in this domain, the internship period during their Bachelor's Degree studies was ‘very helpful’ and ‘helpful’. In the five steps Likert scale that we used to measure that role we can conclude that 60% (N=73) of the total number of respondents that mentioned that they are employed (N=121) considered that the internship period during the Bachelor's Degree study was ‘very helpful’/‘helpful’/‘appropriate’ for them and contributed to finding a job in this domain. It is easily notable from **Figure 8** below, that the social work alumni that are currently working after graduation in the social work domain had the advantage of the practice experience during their university studies. And only 14 (12%) respondents that are in the labour market selected the ‘not helpful’ option.

This means that the way the actual university program is configured helps to better integrate its alumni in the market field at the local level. Improvements are always needed and foreseen as normal in such a fluid domain where we activate.



**Figure 8.** Comparing practice during Bachelor's Degree studies and finding a job in the work market  
 Source: created by the author

From the above results, we can highlight that until now the actual undergraduate studies in social work from the university founded in 1990, which organizes Bachelor Degree studies in social work and is localized in the North-East area of Romania contributed to preparing and intermediate properly the insertion on the labour market for its alumni. The main motivation factors mentioned by the respondents regarding the quick insertion into the labour market are related to the fact that: *'I feel prepared for challenges that they will come'* (Female, 24 years), *'the fact that I was involved in COVID-19 and Ukrainian refugees' crisis gave me more confidence'* (Male, 22 years), *'the local community support me'* (Female, 44 years).

During the three years of university studies the students enrolled in a social work undergraduate studies have the opportunity to participate in internships starting from the second year of study, because national standards require. For example, at University 'Stefan cel Mare' of Suceava, Faculty of History, Geography and Social Studies, Department of Humanities and Socio-political Studies, for their enrolled students' Bachelor Degrees and Master of Arts in social work domain, has signed many partnership agreements with institutions, both public and private sector, which activate in social work domain in Suceava county and nearby counties, such as seen in **Table 1** below in this paper. We believe similar partnerships, at the local level, are also signed at the other 31 universities that have the opportunity to also enrol students in the social work domain. This way can ensure a direct connection with beneficiaries, and the labour market, and a smooth passage is made from theory to practice for all the involved actors in the teaching process.

**Table 1.** Indicative list of organizations where students can perform internships during undergraduate studies in social work

Type of organization	Name of the organization	Website
Public	General Directorate of Social Work and Child Protection Suceava ( <i>rom. Direcția Generală de Asistență Socială și Protecția Copilului</i> )*	<a href="https://dginaspcsv.ro/">https://dginaspcsv.ro/</a>
	Directorate of Social Assistance ( <i>rom. Direcția de Asistență Socială</i> )	<a href="https://shorturl.at/GIKUZ">https://shorturl.at/GIKUZ</a>
	Agency for Payments and Social Inspection from Suceava County ( <i>rom. Agenția Județeană pentru Plăți și Inspecție Socială Suceava</i> )	<a href="https://suceava.mmanpis.ro/">https://suceava.mmanpis.ro/</a>
	Probation Service from Suceava ( <i>rom. Serviciul de Probațiune Suceava</i> )	<a href="https://probațiune.just.ro/contacts/">https://probațiune.just.ro/contacts/</a>
	Botoșani Penitentiary ( <i>rom. Penitenciarul Botoșani</i> )	<a href="https://anp.gov.ro/penitenciarul-botosani/">https://anp.gov.ro/penitenciarul-botosani/</a>
	National Agency Against Human Trafficking - Regional Center from Suceava ( <i>rom. Agenția Națională Împotriva Traficului de Persoane – Centrul regional Suceava</i> )	<a href="https://anitp.mai.gov.ro/centre-regionale/">https://anitp.mai.gov.ro/centre-regionale/</a>
	Private / Non-profit organization	Save the Children organization ( <i>rom. Organizatia Salvati Copiii</i> )
Association „Smooth Light” Suceava ( <i>rom. Asociația „Lumină Lină” Suceava</i> )		<a href="https://shorturl.at/qyPRZ">https://shorturl.at/qyPRZ</a>
Diecezan center Iasi, Caritas Association – Suceava Branch ( <i>rom. Centrul Diecezan Iași, Asociația Caritas – filiala Suceava</i> )		<a href="http://www.caritas-iasi.ro">www.caritas-iasi.ro</a>
Iochebed Foundation, Center Iochebed Suceava ( <i>rom. Fundația Iochebed, Centrul Iochebed Suceava</i> )		<a href="https://shorturl.at/flnBL">https://shorturl.at/flnBL</a>
Association for Intervention in Autism Suceava ( <i>rom. Asociația pentru Intervenție în Autism Suceava</i> )		<a href="https://shorturl.at/cgNV0">https://shorturl.at/cgNV0</a>
FARA Foundation ( <i>rom. Fundația FARA</i> )		<a href="https://faracharity.ro/">https://faracharity.ro/</a>
Romanian Red Cross Suceava Branch ( <i>rom. Crucea Roșie Română Filiala Suceava</i> )		<a href="https://crucearosiesuceava.ro/">https://crucearosiesuceava.ro/</a>
eLIBERARE Association - Suceava Branch ( <i>rom. Asociația eLIBERARE - Filiala Suceava</i> )		<a href="https://www.eliberare.com/">https://www.eliberare.com/</a>
Association „Smell of heaven” Suceava ( <i>rom. Asociația „Miros de cer”, Suceava</i> )		<a href="https://www.mirosdecer.ro/">https://www.mirosdecer.ro/</a>



Type of organization	Name of the organization	Website
	Alcoholics Anonymous from Romania, Suceava Branch ( <i>rom. Alcoolicii Anonimi din Romania, Filiala Suceava</i> )	<a href="https://alcoolicianonimi.ro/">https://alcoolicianonimi.ro/</a>
	Association Kairos ( <i>rom. Asociația Kairos</i> )	<a href="https://shorturl.at/acoDJ">https://shorturl.at/acoDJ</a>
	Association Fight for freedom ( <i>rom. Asociația Fight for freedom</i> )	<a href="https://www.fightforfreedom.ro/">https://www.fightforfreedom.ro/</a>
	Association Teona Ariana, Suceava ( <i>rom. Asociația Teona Ariana, Suceava</i> )	<a href="https://www.teona-ariana.ro/">https://www.teona-ariana.ro/</a>
	Home for the elderly, Solca ( <i>rom. Căminul pentru persoane vârstnice, Solca</i> )	<a href="http://solca.ro/index.php/caminul-pentru-persoane-varsnice-2/">http://solca.ro/index.php/caminul-pentru-persoane-varsnice-2/</a>
	Association of the Institute for Social Partnership Bucovina ( <i>rom. Asociația Institutul pentru Parteneriat Social Bucovina</i> )	<a href="https://bucovinainstitute.org/">https://bucovinainstitute.org/</a>

\*Here are also included all residential Centre's that are in its subordination

Source: created by the author

We need to mention that the undergraduates from social work at the university founded in 1990, which organizes Bachelor Degree studies in social work and is localized in the North-East area of Romania are very active as internships in public and/or private entities from Suceava county, Botoșani, Rădăuți, Vatra Dornei and all the neighbouring counties from Suceava, such as Piatra Neamț, Roman, Iași or local halls. Also, some students can do their internship period at their social work office in his/her home village. This way they interact and learn directly and actively from their local entities and contribute to the identification and solving of the needs identified for the social work beneficiaries and this way they contribute to local community development.

With the help of open questions used in our questionnaire, we tried to identify the modalities that the students and alumni have to access internships and job opportunities. We managed to identify that some of the students already had parents (*'my mother works at X shelter as healthcare and since I was I child I went there and I started to volunteer and I liked what I was doing'* - Male, 23 years), relatives or friends (*'my mother's friend works as a social worker and told me that is a nice job'* - Female, 24 years) that work in the social work domain. This type of social capital contributed for them to easily participate in internships and also find a suitable job in the social work domain.

Some of the respondents mentioned that they managed to get hired in the same place where they did their internship during undergraduate studies due to their earnestness and commitment (*'I was an internship during my second and third study year and after I graduated the mayor offered me the position of social worker because it was unoccupied and several times nobody presented at the exam'* - Female, 25 years).

From all the answers that we received to the open questions from the questionnaire, we can say that the internships and the employment rate exist due to strong community partnerships among university and local organizations from social work. And, also due to informal capital existing locally binds the people and provides them a security feeling and willingness to contribute to sustainable community development.

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

Even though the national social work system is in the same category as the medical system, there is the Sectoral Committee on Social Work and Medical Assistance, the first one has many steps to fulfil and become as structured and completely efficient as the medical one. As we can see important steps were made and we are in the growth trend and still developing. Regulations, institutional strategies, formal and informal capital, and current networks are the key elements that contributed to the social work domain update and its contribution to local development.

National regulations are now existing and are continuously updated to current needs. Also, since 2005 The National College of Social Workers which `represents the interests of the social worker profession` (*The National College of Social Workers*, 2004) was founded. It brings together social workers from Romania and promotes this profession. In the last ten years, it has extended its branches at the local community level and more information to the stakeholders and population was disseminated. The main goal is to create a stronger synergy among specialists from the social work domain, both locally and nationally.

The present exploratory study emphasizes the positive impact of one university founded in 1990, that organizes Bachelor's Degree studies in social work and is localized in the northeast area of Romania and the large percentage of the immediate absorption of social work alumni on the local labour market. The objective of the exploratory study is reached and we can state that we managed to identify that the seven years' alumni cohorts in the social work domain from the targeted university we choose are hired in the social work domain and into the actual labour market and brings its contribution to the community development.

The four main research questions of the exploratory study are answered, namely:

- (1) The female in a larger number of respondents and alumni from the social work domain.
- (2) There are three main categories for workforce distribution on domains of alumni from social work: `social workers`, `teaching staff`, and `specialist in another domain`. Each above category includes different types of specialists from the labour market, such as: `social workers` (therapists, interns, therapists for children with autism syndrome, probation counsellor, day center coordinator for elderly people, specialist inspector); `teaching staff` (assistants for kindergarten teacher, kindergarten teacher,

teacher of math and mechanics, elementary teacher) and `specialist in another domain` (transport coordinator, administrator, recruitment specialist, sales advisor, counselling assistant, trade worker, call center operator, acquisition specialist, police personnel, HR inspector, data processing operator, translator, nurse, shift leader).

- (3) Exists a connection between internships during undergraduate studies and working in the social work domain after graduation because they managed to interact with organizations and specialists from the domain making the transition to the labour market easier this way. We may say that the informal social capital and social networks contributed to student and alumni employment. Also, the labour market assures the absorption of alumni from social work-study programs. And, finally, the current internships, as social capital, social norms, and institutional practice, during undergraduate studies properly mediate insertion on the labour market in social work.
- (4) The re-qualification of alumni from the social work domain is the main idea encountered among the respondents from our survey.

This exploratory study can represent the early foundation for a sustainable image of employment and research contribution to the social work system in Romania. According to our exploratory study results from the 174 respondents, 121 are already in the labour market during their university studies and immediately after graduation. Of the 121 respondents, 42 work in the social work system with a different executive or leading attributions, in public or private entities from local and national levels.

We know that at the moment the current social work services are not covering the needs of the existing beneficiaries, a large number of social work entities need to be created in Romania during the next years, as a short-, medium- and long-term goal. Even though this is a minus, we noticed that the actual number of specialists from the social work domain are motivated enough to keep working in the system and contribute to the local community development.

All these being said we are at the stage where we can propose some viable solutions for increasing the engagement of students and several alumni in the social work system from Romania, in four directions:

- (1) *National level*, such as increasing the number of social workers from the institutions chart correlated with the total number of existing beneficiaries from that area (this way you do not overcharge the social worker); increasing the budget for the social work system (social benefits and services); clear regulation on performance indicators and possibilities for career paths;
- (2) *Institutional level*, such as permanent participation in lifelong learning programs so that she/he will be updated on current methods and solutions (for example: during COVID-19 and Ukrainian refugee crisis,

even when new legislations are issued and need to be implemented); involvement of more interns for social work activities;

- (3) *Community level*, such as: creating a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary team for crisis situations and for daily ones; increasing the partnerships among stakeholders; participation at national information campaigns on different domains themes, etc.
- (4) *Personal levels*, such as the correlation between the social worker and their specialization (for example: if a person specializes in probation service, he/she should be left in that service to perform and not be moved to another service); work motivation for activity improvement.

The fulfilment of these may help to increase employment in the social work sector workforce. There are no limits; the list is still open to other solutions that will appear during the activities that will be performed next by the specialists trying to solve the upcoming problems for their beneficiaries.

### **Limitations of our research**

The present exploratory study has its limitations, namely:

- the lack of official statistics regarding the number of social workers working and specializing in different types of beneficiaries (e.g. children at risk, elderly persons, disabilities, chronic disease);
- the lack of comparative analyses at the national level for alumni of social work from all universities that organize Bachelor Degree studies in social work;
- the reduced number of persons that answered the open questions from the questionnaire;
- the reduced number of respondents: for the online questionnaire it is possible that the alumni received a junk message and they were not able to answer the questions;
- the respondents' lack of experience being in their first year of job and not having the whole image of the social work system.

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