

## JOB QUALITY WITHIN THE CAREGIVING SECTOR

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### **Abstract:**

*The concept of decent work and the job quality indicators have long been topics of research and debate among academia. The concept of job quality has emerged as intended to promote social and economic well-being through proactive interest and concern in the wants and needs of individuals at work. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the quality of job-related conditions in the field of caregiving for elderly people and children in the context of Romanians' East-West migration. The present paper's purpose was accomplished using a structured questionnaire. The findings underscore the fact that migrant Romanians working in the caregiving area experience proper working conditions, with the job quality standards frequently met. However, certain job quality challenges have been identified, such as issues connected to work accidents and burnout prevention, unclear employment conditions, or overtime pay that is not always complying with legal requirements. As a result, these findings open the door for further research and debate.*

**Keywords:** Job Quality, Decent Work, Migration, Caregiving Field, Romania

**JEL classification:** J81, J83, J28, J61

### **1. Introduction**

Migration is an omnipresent phenomenon that impacts people all over the world. This topic sparks the attention of a wide range of researchers and academics, that vary from sociologists and psychologists to political scientists and economists. The latter ones have been seeking to establish the economic factors that influence the migration process, and several findings have emerged in this regard. For instance, improving income prospects in the destination country greatly increases the size of immigration (Mayda, 2005) or being satisfied with one's own wage reduces the tendency to leave (Zaiceva and Zimmermann, 2008). Furthermore, some other findings suggest that the process of migration could grow with the percentage of highly educated individuals in the region, and that relatively recent migration is unrelated to the destination country's GDP per capita (Brezzei et. al, 2010). Sprenger (2013) discovers that a greater unemployment rate in the source country enhances emigration whereas a higher unemployment rate in the destination country lowers immigration. It was further found that one of the most significant causes of migration is the cost of living (Nica, 2015), and that labour market conditions are a major factor for migration (Prada et. al., 2015).

In the case of Romania, various studies on the factors of migrations have been conducted, and some of them indicated that if GDP increases, the permanent number of emigrants decreases (Condratov, 2018) or that even though new companies are being established, the employment conditions and earnings given are insufficient, and individuals will continue to migrate from Romania (Prada et. al., 2015). Romania's migration status determines the geographical focus of the present paper's analysis on the quality of job-related conditions in the field of caregiving for old persons and children in the context of Romanians' East-West migration. According to a United Nations Migration Report (IOM, 2015), Romania was the second country in the world (after Syria, a country affected by civil war) that experienced a significant growth in the number of its diaspora population between 2000 and 2015. Furthermore, the Romanian diaspora is the world's fifth largest, according to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2019). As employment is the most prevalent reason for Romanians to migrate to other countries in the EU (OECD, 2019), and, therefore, people migrate in

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order to find jobs or to find better employment conditions, a look into the migrants' working conditions quality can offer an useful insight towards the European labour market. The caregiving sector was chosen to be analysed in the present paper because in the context of East-West migration women begun to represent a source of income not only within their families, but also for their country's internal resources, through so-called remittance structures, which have shown to play a critical role in improving the social and economic status of the least developed countries (Constanzo and Gravina, 2022, p. 2). More exactly, in the case of Romanian migrant women, their workforce is typically engaged in elderly care and babysitting services (Constanzo and Gravina, 2022).

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows. Section 1 summarises some of the literature on the concept of decent work and the quality of working conditions, especially within the European Union's context. Section 2 presents the used methodology and the structure of the questionnaire, and Sections 3 outlines the results and discussions. Some final remarks conclude the paper.

## **2. Brief literature review**

### **2.1. The concept of decent work**

The International Labour Organisation (ILO), a specialised agency of the United Nations, officially adopted the notion of "decent work" in the late 1990s. The notion was officially introduced by the ILO at its 86th International Labour Conference in 1998. At this conference, the ILO issued the "Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work" which made decent work a core topic. Researchers have been seeking to operationalize the notion of decent work since its initial debut, attempting to uncover appropriate statistical indicators that might be utilised for monitoring progress towards expanding decent work and comparing its prevalence in different regions of the globe (Anker et. al., 2002; Ghai, 2003). Despite being aware of the subjective nature of these indicators, researchers were able to bring up the incidence of unacceptable forms of work, the availability of work, working hours, measure of earnings, job security and safety, fair treatment, social protection, and social dialogue (Anker et. al., 2002). The literature on the concept of decent work is divided into two camps: one that supports and encourages the idea and the practices related to decent work, and another camp that criticises and questions this concept. In the words of Hauf (2015), there are two basic lines of perception for decent work: optimistic and pessimistic. The optimistic researchers who support the concept of decent work generally argue towards its positive impact on labour rights (Anker and Anker, 2017), the need to extend decent work principles to workers in informal and vulnerable employment (Chen et. al., 2001), its importance in improving economic and social well-being (Fields, 2003), its significance in worker's work engagement (Navajas-Romero et. al., 2019) or its central role in promoting social justice (Vosko, 2002). On the other side, the pessimistic side of the literature emphasises how it has not been successful in undermining the theoretical labour market model that has served as the foundation of economic and development thought on employment issues (Ramos and Acost, 2006), how due to decent work related practices the potential negative employment effects of minimum wage increases (Neumark and Wascher, 2007), how the decent work notion does not introduce anything new, but rather rename already existing concepts (Spooner and Waterman, 2015), how although it is a desirable aspirational goal, it has proven to be too ambiguous and expansive to be empirically analysed (Burchell et. al., 2013) or this pessimistic side also highlights the implementation of decent work policies, or the challenges involved in achieving decent work in the context of evolving labour markets (Standing, 2002, 2008). Even though the concept of decent work is yet relatively recent, it has sparked beneficial debate, with scholars who embrace and support its concepts and practises, as well as academics who are sceptical and emphasise its weaknesses and negative features.

### **2.2. Job quality**

The analysis and discussion of job quality has long been a matter of study and debate. Giving credit, articulating, and evaluating job quality is a challenging task, as there is no agreement on what job quality is about, even after an extended interest in the subject (Sen Gupta et. al., 2009; Findlay et. al.,

2013). To begin with the terminology, there is a broad range of terms used in the literature to define the same concept, in addition to the word "job quality": "quality of working life", "employment quality", "quality of work", etc. (Stefana *et. al.*, 2021). When it comes to job quality, scholars have varied perspectives. For example, sociologists focus on competence and autonomy, economics on pay, psychologists on job fulfilment, but it is acknowledged that job quality impacts men and women differently, with more women than men working in low-wage jobs in developed economies (Findlay *et. al.*, 2013). However, numerous factors are considered while researching the topic of job quality, and they typically refer to:

**Table 1: Job quality dimensions**

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Vision</i>
<b>Physical environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elimination or minimising physical risks (such as vibrations from machinery, loud noise, or high temperatures).</li> </ul>
<b>Work intensity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paying attention to if the workload is excessive or if the tasks demand too much energy.</li> </ul>
<b>Skills and discretion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dealing with whether work helps people utilise their abilities and develop and grow because of their work experience</li> </ul>
<b>Working time quality</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Referring to a well-balanced time allocation for work, care, leisure, volunteering, and personal development.</li> </ul>
<b>Prospects</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Considering qualities of a job that contribute to a person's desire for consistent employment.</li> </ul>
<b>Social environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing considerable opportunities for interacting with other people.</li> </ul>
<b>Earnings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceiving a fair pay as wages and revenues represent the most important feature of work.</li> </ul>

Source: Eurofound (2021, p. 9)

Some other criteria found within the literature may be also related to the economic conditions of the region (Cooke, 2007) or work arrangements that are continuous (Zeytinoglu *et al.*, 2009). Besides criteria and dimensions of job quality, to make this concept measurable, there have also been created various indexes of job quality, such as the Laeken Indicators of Job Quality, the European Job Quality Index or Ghai's Decent Work Index (Contreras, 2009; Ghai, 2003).

Nonetheless, the most intense debate in the literature over job quality is between mainstream economics on one hand, and "economics of happiness" on the other. Mainstream economics generally focus on income per capita as the best way of measuring well-being and argue that individuals are compelled to work as an unfavourable result of not having enough money to live a leisurely life: they must choose between income and leisure. People will relinquish part of their leisure, for example, will work, only if they are compensated, if they are paid, for it (Bustillo *et. al.*, 2011, p. 30). The problem of working life quality is solved if the appropriate compensation for working in "poor" circumstances is truly met in the labour market, and job quality is a result of workers' preferences and decisions (Smith, 1776; Rosen, 1986). On the other hand, the "economics of happiness" emphasise that happiness is a scientifically measurable individual characteristic. Consequently, the crucial role of non-monetary aspects of work, such as job autonomy, meaningfulness, social support, and opportunities for skill development determine the fact that well-being and job quality extends beyond financial compensation and monetary aspects of work (Layard, 2005, 2004; Green, 2006).

### 3. Methodology

A study on the sample of Romanian workers and ex-workers in the field of caregiving was conducted to have a look into the quality of their working conditions. The structured questionnaire method was applied. Using Google Docs, I have created a form which virtually represents the online survey. After creating the form, I have sent it directly to people knowing that they work or worked in the field of caregiving, and they have also experienced the East-West migration process. The structured questionnaire includes a part of General Information and a part that specifically refers to Indicators of

job quality. Therefore, the first part includes 5 closed questions that refer to Age, Originating area (rural/urban), Gender, Years of experience in caregiving, and If they had a job before leaving Romania and working in this sector. In the second part, the measuring instrument (questionnaire) for this research consisted of 7 sets of 31 questions in total that the respondents were asked to answer and express their agreement/disagreement with the proposed statements, whereby the Likert measurement scale of five degrees was used (1=totally disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neither agree nor disagree; 4=agree; 5=total agreement). The job quality-related questions of the present questionnaire were adapted from The European Job Quality Index (EJQI), The Laeken Indicators of Job Quality and The European Working Conditions Survey.

#### 4. Results and discussions

Starting with the first part of the questionnaire, from the total of 11 respondents, 5 of them (45,5%) are between 55 and 65 years old, the rest of them being between 35-45 and 45-55 years old. Out of 11, 7 respondents (63,6%) originated from the rural area and all of them were women. The years of experience within the caregiving sector varied, having respondents from all categories (2 respondents between 1 and 5 years experience, 3 respondents between 5 and 10, 3 respondents between 10 and 15, and other 3 respondents over 20). From 11 respondents, 9 of them (81,8%) had a job before leaving Romania and working in the caregiving sector. Table 2 summarises the profile of the 11 respondents, considering the General Information section.

**Table 2. Respondents' profile**

General information	Percentage (%)
<i>Age</i>	
18-35	0
35-45	18,2
45-55	36,4
55-65	45,5
+ 65	0
<i>Originating area</i>	
Rural	63,6
Urban	36,4
<i>Gender</i>	
Male	0
Female	100
Others	0
<i>Years of experience in the caregiving sector</i>	
1-5	18,2
5-10	27,3
10-15	27,3
+20	27,3
<i>A job before leaving Romania and working in this sector</i>	
Yes	81,8
No	18,2

The second section of the questionnaire is about A. Health, safety, and the working environment, B. Work contract, C. Salary and working hours, D. Freedom of movement and constraints, E. Recruitment and working conditions, and F. Workers' rights and awareness, and these are the seven sets which include the total number of 31 Likert scale statements. For each statement's responses it was considered the descriptive statistics' mean in order to establish which is the most and the least agreed statement.

For the first set, **Health, safety, and the working environment**, *I have/had access to the resources and tools needed to do my job effectively* is the statement the respondents agreed the most (Agree) and *I am/have been encouraged to take breaks and manage my workload to prevent burnout* is the statement respondents agreed the least (Disagree).

For the second set, **Work contract**, *I have/had an individual work contract* is the statement the respondents agreed the most (Agree) and *There were changes to the employment contract without my consent* is the statement respondents agreed the least (Neither agree nor disagree).

For the third set, **Salary and working hours**, *I work/have worked the legal number of hours per week* is the statement the respondents agreed the most (Total agreement) and *I am/have been paid for overtime in accordance with legal requirements* is the statement respondents agreed the least (Neither agree nor disagree).

For the fourth set, **Freedom of movement and constraints**, *I have had access to the resources and information needed to plan and carry out travel or relocation* is the statement the respondents agreed the most (Agree) and *I am/have been subjected to physical (hitting) or verbal abuse or threats at work* is the statement respondents agreed the least (Disagree).

For the fifth set, **Recruitment and working conditions**, *During the recruitment process I was provided with accurate information about the job, salaries and working conditions* and *I got the job through someone I knew* are the statements the respondents agreed the most (Total agreement) and *I got the job through a specialised recruitment agency* and *I paid a certain amount of money to get my current/former job* are the statement respondents agreed the least (Disagree).

For the sixth set, **Workers' rights and awareness**, *I know/have known my rights as a worker* is the statement the respondents agreed the most (Agree) and *I know/have known how to report situations of labour exploitation and request assistance in this situation* is the statement respondents agreed the least (Neither agree nor disagree).

The most and the least agreed statements give an insight into the quality of working conditions the respondents are experiencing or have experienced while working within the caregiving sector in the East-West migration context. In regard to the working environment, respondents tend to be satisfied with the safety and physical features of the workplace, however they are concerned towards health as burnout, accidents and injuries have not always been addressed appropriately by the employer. Regarding the working contract matter, the respondents agree that they have or have had an individual work contract with clearly specified terms and conditions, nevertheless they also agree working under some unclear employment conditions. The salary and working hour's part reveal fair aspects as respondents work or have worked the legal number of hours per week, and they are also or have been paid at least the minimum wage required by law, nonetheless, respondents faced some issues in the payment of overtime in accordance with the legal requirements. The respondents' answers indicate no problematic aspects in relation to the freedom of movement as they had the freedom to change jobs, they haven't had to hand over identity documents or they haven't been subjected to any physical abuses or threats at work. In terms of recruitment and working conditions it can be observed that the main tendency is that respondents got the job through someone they know, and they did not get it through a specialised recruitment agency; the working conditions seem not to impose serious issues as the respondents haven't experienced constraints or form of forced labour. As for the workers' rights and awareness it can be noticed an interesting fact, even though the respondents claim to know their rights as workers and their rights have been respected by their employers, they are still not sure they know how to report situations of labour exploitation and how to request assistance in this situation.

## 5. Conclusion

The Eastern enlargement of the European Union has increased East-West migration within the European continent, and Romanians are no exception from the rule of moving and working abroad. Considering employment as the primary reason for Romanian migrants leaving their country to look for work or a better job elsewhere, the chance to analyse the quality of working conditions faced by them is offered. Because migration has provided women the opportunity to become sources of income, it has been observed that Romanian migrant women tend to work in the caregiving sector. Furthermore, the concepts of decent work and job quality are relatively new concepts that have piqued the interest of a wide range of specialists, ranging from sociologists and psychologists to political scientists and



economists. Aside from their relative novelty in the academic community, the brief literature review conducted within the current paper demonstrates that researchers typically support and be sceptical of both decent work and job quality.

The conclusions that can be drawn from the questionnaire conducted within the present paper reveal that migrant Romanians working abroad in the caregiving sector encounter proper job quality conditions regarding health, safety, and the working environment; the work contract; the salary and working hours; freedom of movement and constraints; recruitment and working conditions and workers' rights and awareness. Nevertheless, some issues have been found in regard to work-related accidents and the prevention of burnout; the unclear employment conditions; overtime remuneration not always being in line with legal requirements; some constraints regarding the activities undertaken at work; the lack of getting a job through specialised agencies which may lead to abusive situations; and the uncertainty of being able to report situations of exploitation and requesting assistance in this case. Therefore, these conclusions allow opportunity for more research and discussion.

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**Appendix A**

**Questionnaire on The analysis of job quality indicators in the care of the elderly and children sector in the context of East-West migration**

<b>SECTION I. GENERAL INFORMATION</b>	
<b>Age:</b> <input type="radio"/> 18-35 years <input type="radio"/> 35-45 years <input type="radio"/> 45-55 years <input type="radio"/> 55-65 years <input type="radio"/> + 65 years	<b>Years of caregiving experience:</b> <input type="radio"/> 1-5 years <input type="radio"/> 5-10 years <input type="radio"/> 10-15 years <input type="radio"/> + 20 years
<b>Environment of origin:</b> <input type="radio"/> Urban <input type="radio"/> Rural	<b>Did you have a job before entering the caregiving sector?</b> <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
<b>Gender:</b> <input type="radio"/> Male <input type="radio"/> Female <input type="radio"/> Other	

**SECTION II.**

<b>Health, safety, and the working environment</b>	<i>Totally disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither agree nor disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Total agreement</i>
The workspace is/was comfortable and conducive to the tasks I performed	1	2	3	4	5
I have/had access to the resources and tools needed to do my job effectively	1	2	3	4	5
I am/have been offered a safe and healthy work environment	1	2	3	4	5
I am/have been informed about health and safety regulations and procedures at work	1	2	3	4	5
I have had work-related accidents or injuries and they have been reported and addressed appropriately	1	2	3	4	5
I am/have been encouraged to take breaks and manage my workload to prevent burnout.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel/have felt comfortable reporting any health or safety issues to my employer	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Work contract</i>	<i>Totally disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither agree nor disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Total agreement</i>
I have/had an individual work contract	1	2	3	4	5
My individual work contract clearly states/stated my work responsibilities, working hours and salary details	1	2	3	4	5
I am/have been aware of the terms and conditions of my work contract	1	2	3	4	5
I worked/work under ambiguous or unclear employment conditions.	1	2	3	4	5
There were changes to the employment contract without my consent	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Salary and working hours</i>	<i>Totally disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither agree nor disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Total agreement</i>

I am/was paid at least the minimum wage required by law	1	2	3	4	5
I receive/have regularly received pay slips documenting salary and deductions	1	2	3	4	5
I am/have been granted breaks and rest periods as required by law	1	2	3	4	5
I work/have worked the legal number of hours per week	1	2	3	4	5
I am/have been paid for overtime in accordance with legal requirements	1	2	3	4	5
<b><i>Freedom of movement and constraints</i></b>	<b><i>Totally disagree</i></b>	<b><i>Disagree</i></b>	<b><i>Neither agree nor disagree</i></b>	<b><i>Agree</i></b>	<b><i>Total agreement</i></b>
I am/had the freedom to leave and change jobs	1	2	3	4	5
I/have had access to the resources and information needed to plan and carry out travel or relocation	1	2	3	4	5
I have to/had to hand over my identity documents or personal belongings	1	2	3	4	5
I am/have been subjected to physical (hitting) or verbal abuse or threats at work	1	2	3	4	5
<b><i>Recruitment and working conditions</i></b>	<b><i>Totally disagree</i></b>	<b><i>Disagree</i></b>	<b><i>Neither agree nor disagree</i></b>	<b><i>Agree</i></b>	<b><i>Total agreement</i></b>
I paid a certain amount of money to get my current/former job	1	2	3	4	5
I got the job through a specialised recruitment agency	1	2	3	4	5
I got the job through someone I knew	1	2	3	4	5
During the recruitment process I was provided with accurate information about the job, salaries and working conditions	1	2	3	4	5
I have experienced forms of forced labour (worked against my will by being forced by someone else to undertake certain jobs)	1	2	3	4	5
I have experienced various forms of constraints regarding the activities undertaken at work	1	2	3	4	5
<b><i>Workers' rights and awareness</i></b>	<b><i>Totally disagree</i></b>	<b><i>Disagree</i></b>	<b><i>Neither agree nor disagree</i></b>	<b><i>Agree</i></b>	<b><i>Total agreement</i></b>
I know/have known my rights as a worker	1	2	3	4	5
My work-related rights and grievances are/were respected and addressed by my employer	1	2	3	4	5
I am/have been aware of local laws and regulations governing labour rights and protections	1	2	3	4	5
I know/have known how to report situations of labour exploitation and request assistance in this situation	1	2	3	4	5