

PERCEPTIONS OF THIRD COUNTRY MIGRANTS ABOUT SECONDARY LABOR MARKET CONCENTRATION. A CASE OF CALL CENTER JOBS IN ROMANIA

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This article sets to investigate the perceptions of migrants about call center labor in Romania. Narrative evidence was gathered from six oral history interviews conducted between June 2021 and January 2022 with third country nationals who lived in Romania. All of them had call-center labor experiences in this country. Narrative research is employed in order to analyze and interpret the lived experiences recalled by the migrants. Results show that the lack of destination language skills, of sufficient professional experience, and the unrecognition of home society qualifications are among the most encountered ideas which migrants believe restrict their access onto the primary labor market, and force them into the secondary market. Deskilling is also common among migrants, who accept secondary labor market jobs, below their qualifications, because of migrant-related status reasons that impede their access onto the primary labor market. Nonetheless, high attrition rates specific to call-center businesses can be regarded as an advantage for migrants, allowing them ease of access and exit onto and from the secondary labor market.

Keywords: dual labor market; secondary labor market; migration; call centers; social stratification.

INTRODUCTION

Romania has become a pivotal point in the transnationalization of call center jobs. The provision of cheap labor, as well as educated and disciplined workers, as noticed by Baglioni (2022) for other similar countries, has made Romania attractive for call center and help desk services. An additional benefit is that, over recent years, Romania has attracted increasingly more third country nationals who settled for various reasons (family reunification, studies etc.), thus creating a pool of transnational experience within the country. The annual quota of third country (non-EU) workers admitted onto the Romanian labor market has gradually

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increased since 2015 onwards, from 5,500 workers between 2015 and 2017 to 100,000 workers in 2022, as can be seen in *Table no. 1*.

Table no. 1

The annual quota of third country (non-EU) workers admitted onto the Romanian labor market

Year	Annual Quota	Y-o-Y Change
2022	100,000	100%
2021	50,000	67%
2020	30,000	50%
2019	20,000	33%
2018	15,000	173%
2017	5,500	0%
2016	5,500	0%
2015	5,500	/

Source: Own representation based on the data obtained from the press releases of the Ministry of Labour, respectively of the Government of Romania.

Also, the number of Third Country Nationals living in Romania has increased from approximately 63,000 in 2017 to nearly 84,000 in 2021 (European Commission n.d.), and this despite restrictions imposed by governments due to the Covid-19 pandemic. These changes in numbers show that the Romanian labor market has internationalized more and more over the recent years, even if Romania still remains a country of emigration more than one of immigration (Șerban 2014; Șerban 2015). Such cross-border movements give call centers the opportunity to access and mobilize international employee skills and qualifications from within the sovereign jurisdictional boundaries of Romania, at lower costs than in other parts of the world, hence optimizing the value chains of businesses.

Call center businesses relocate to countries that offer cheap labor (such as Romania), while they can also find international people living there who are native in the languages that the jobs are created for. Hence, the labor of migrants living in Romania is desired by global call centers doing business from Romania, as it comes with two advantages at once: cheap labor costs plus native language skills. Thus, it can be said that the transnational call center industry benefits from international migration.

Nevertheless, call center jobs can be regarded as double-edged swords. On the one hand, they easily secure employment for migrants, given their native language fluency. Yet, on the other hand, call center jobs also mean harsh labor conditions: lots of stress, rigid management, stringent procedures, and workplace hurdles etc. (Brophy 2010).

Over the recent years, an increase in the recruitment of migrants, who are fluent in their native languages (not necessarily in Romanian as well), has been witnessed in call centers operating in Romania. The recruitment requirements are rather uncomplicated: with crash courses (induction programmes) for new

employees and on-the-job-training provided by the employer, call center recruiters generally look for basic computer and communication skills, to which, depending on the country or region that the call center is serving, (additional) language skills are a plus. Becoming a teleoperator does not actually require any particular qualifications apart from a good command of language (Bolton 2013). Migrants represent a reasonable target workforce for call center jobs, as often their lack of professional experience, as well as the need, or maybe even the despair of finding a job in Romania, both added to their mother tongue fluency, make them ideal candidates. This mother tongue mastery, plus the readiness to accept the job as an opportunity to enter the domestic labor market, transform migrants into exemplary contenders for call center jobs.

However, not knowing the Romanian language, migrants are often confined to call-center jobs, as reported by participants in the oral history interviews, thus making them a vulnerable workforce, who, unable to find employment in other sectors of the economy, particularly on the primary labor market, is willing to lower the standards and to accept the offers from call centers, especially since these are ready to take over the administrative-legal formalities necessary for the employment of a third-country national. The aspect of destination language skills, and their impact upon employment has been extensively studied in scientific research (see Chang 2021; Dadabaev *et al.* 2021; Jentjens 2021).

This paper is situated at the intersection between migration and the dual labor market system, trying to explain the concentration of migrants into the secondary labor market, by using the example of call centers as employers. The second and third chapters of this article set the theoretical foundations, and are concerned with the connection between the secondary labor market and migration, respectively with how call centers fit into this connection. The methodological section offers details about how the oral history interviews were conducted and how evidence was interpreted, and, then, the results and discussions sections provide the voices of the migrants interviewed to defend or to oppose ideas emerging from the scientific theory. Characteristics of the dual labor market social stratification (rejection from the primary market and concentration into the secondary) are revealed by the presentation of statements that were extracted from the oral history interviews.

THE SECONDARY LABOR MARKET AND MIGRATION

Several scientific studies have focused on the flow of immigrants onto the secondary labor market of the recipient country, discussing about a concentration of foreign workers into this lower end of the stratified occupational system (Białobłocki 2021; Doeringer and Piore 1971, x; Wilson and Portes 1980). As a matter of fact, the dual labor market theory employed at large during the 1970's and 1980's has been rediscovered over the recent years as a consequence of an

increasing trend in international migration (Bahna and Sekulová 2019, 119). Research shows that migrants or ethnic minorities with few or no know-how at all about receiving country specifics tend to be channeled towards the secondary labor market (Białobłocki 2021; Seckin 2008). Buzdugan and Halli (2009) identify a high concentration of certain socially vulnerable groups, such as migrants, women, or ethnic minorities, in the secondary labor market. Bauder (2006) draws attention that such a concentration bears the risk of being understood as a divisive policy, which might cause hostility. In fact, economists used dual economy models, while sociologists used market segmentation models, in order to demonstrate the stratification of socially disadvantaged groups.

The stratification of the labor market into a primary sector with more prestigious jobs, and a secondary sector with less prestigious, low paid and insecure jobs is characteristic for industrial societies (Briggs 1993; Fine *et al.* 2016), yet specifics of this job clustering can also be identified in a service-based economy, such as that of the 21st century. The secondary labor market is characterized by a low occupational status, lacking prestige or glamour (Doeringer and Piore 1971; Kats 1982). The secondary market tends to take on workers rejected on the primary market because of the lack of official paperwork or documents. As legal documents are often a problem for immigrants, they many times find a place on the secondary market at more ease, compared to the primary labor market. Therefore, dual labor market theories consider migrants as additions to the secondary labor market, often linked with jobs in small, peripheral businesses (Wilson and Portes 1980). Research showed that minorities, such as those formed by immigrants, were disadvantaged by consignment to the secondary labor market, with migrants having to accept lower payment and fewer advancement opportunities.

CALL CENTERS AS PART OF THE SECONDARY LABOR MARKET AND THE EMPLOYMENT OF MIGRANTS

As Wilson and Portes (1980) argued, the secondary labor market is characterized by peripheral businesses, i.e. jobs lying beneath the strict limits of the prevailing current or direction. Outsourcing and the call center industry are often still considered to be a peripheral business function and, hence, part of the secondary labor market, being prompted by the argument of cutting costs down (Beardsell 2009), and by the labor-intensive business model (Padilla-Vega *et al.* 2020; Wang and Hung 2016). While some research considers the call center industry to be a mix of labor-intensive and technology-intensive (Dai and Li 2015), most of the studies identify specifics of the secondary labor market within this industry. Most costs of call centers come from hiring staff (Kim and Park 2007; Wang and Hung 2016). The tasks to be performed in call centers are rather monotonous and repetitive, while the work schedule is stressful, with pressure

being applied by the management in order to push workers to reach quantitative targets. This has made several authors to describe call centers as “electronic sweatshops” (Sato 2018), to be “Fordist” (Ishtiyaque and Gera 2014; Sallaz 2019, 198), or to have a “Taylorist structure” (Hingst and Lowe 2008; Mustosmäki *et al.* 2013; Sinha and Gabriel 2016, 91). According to the Fordist/Taylorist logic, it is the management of the organization that determines how the job should be carried out and with what tools. The management also provides those necessary tools and breaks down the job in specific instances. Such pre-planned routines are also met in call-centers: dialogues between employees and customers are often based on pre-written texts which, Putnam and Loppie (2000) believe, turn employees into robots. The repetitive tasks and the constant supervision from the management make the working conditions in call centers stressful, so one should not be surprised that the quit rates are often high, a characteristic of the secondary labor market (Van Jaarsveld *et al.* 2006).

The transnational call center industry benefits from international migration. Call center businesses can relocate to countries that offer cheap labor (such as Romania), while they can also find international people living there who are native in the languages that call center jobs are created for. Hence, the labor of migrants living in Romania is desired by global call centers doing business from Romania, as it comes with two advantages at once: cheap labor costs plus native language skills. Therefore, Haouari and Laassri (2020, 46–48) believe that the call center industry takes advantage of migrants, aware of their need, almost desperation, of accessing a job. Thus, as mentioned previously, call center jobs can be regarded as double-edged swords. On the one hand, they easily secure employment for migrants, while they also pay fairly decent wages, above the median wage, given the native language fluency of the migrants. While migrants are very often stigmatized, when employed in call centers they are perceived at a higher value, and are much more appreciated because of their ability to use the native language, compared to a domestic employee who might use that language as well, but only as a foreign language. The call center job thus also secures a cultural connection to back home, through the use of language (Rodkey 2016). Yet, on the other hand, call center jobs also mean harsh labor conditions: lots of stress, rigid management, and a wage often lower than what a native employee receives (Brophy 2010).

METHODOLOGY

Twenty semi-structured, oral history interviews have been conducted between June 2021 and January 2022 with migrants living in Romania, for a doctoral research project. The migrants were selected through different techniques: directly from the researcher’s circle of acquaintances; through “cold calls” that involved contacting migrants whose details were publicly available; through the help of representatives of various NGO’s or associations that work with

immigrants for their social inclusion; last but not least, once the contacts were established through any of the three aforementioned techniques, the snowball sampling method was also used, the researcher asking the participants at the end of the interviews if they can recommend other friends who might be willing to also participate.

Of the twenty migrants interviewed, six worked, or have had work experiences in call centers operating in the country, as presented in *Table no. 2*. This research article focuses on the personal narratives of those six migrants and their labor experiences in call centers. Storytelling was encouraged by the oral history form of the interviews, with the participants being asked to present a story of their lives before and after emigration. The interviews were semi-structured, following a set of pre-defined questions, including some regarding labor and employment, yet the discussions during the interviews were let to go along the direction set by the respondents.

The oral history interviews were carried out online, per Zoom, due to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions in place at the moment of collecting the data. Interviews were carried out either in Romanian or in English, depending on the proficiency and the preferences of the participants, and were recorded on the computer for transcription purposes later on. The real names of the participants have been replaced with pseudonyms. The ages of the migrants ranged between 20 and 49: two were in their twenties, two in their thirties, and the other two in their forties at the moment of being interviewed. The research is thus in line with other studies which state that the average age of employees in call centers is around 30 (Michel 2001; Sieben and de Grip 2004). Two were men and four were women.

Table no. 2

Call center labor experience of migrants interviewed

Migrant (age, gender, country of origin)	Mother tongue	Language used during interview	Qualification	Call center
Darcelle (20, F, Cameroon)	French	English	Business administration student	customer complaints call-center with French language (employed for her proficiency in French, as native speaker)
Dabir (26, M, Yemen)	Arabic	English	Polytechnical student	call-center trading cryptocurrencies (employed for his proficiency in English)
Milena (36, F, Belarus)	Russian	Romanian	Philologue, graduated from a faculty of modern languages	call-center on IT project (employed for her proficiency in Russian and English)

Table no. 2 (continued)

Stephanie (37, F, The Philippines)	Filipino	English	Degree of business and entrepreneurship	employed for her proficiency in English and for former experience in call centers back home
Sebastián (49, M, Mexico)	Spanish	English	IT	call-center on human resources project (employed for his native Spanish language skills, on a project with Spanish)
Gloria (45, F, Dominican Republic)	Spanish	Romanian	Medical	call-center (employed for her language skills)

Source: Own compilation of data.

Purpose and Limitations of the Research

As evidenced in the literature, the secondary labor market takes on workers rejected from the primary market (Dickens and Lang 1985), and, in the case of some socially vulnerable groups, tends to concentrate them there. The purpose of this research is to look at the perceptions that the migrants have about working in call centers. For the purpose of the research, call-centers are conceptualized as being part of the secondary labor market.

Narrative(s) research was used for analysis purposes in order to conceptualize the stories recalled by the migrants regarding their labor experiences, and to offer interpretations to the latter ones. The small sample of participants (which can be regarded as one of the limitations of this paper) was used in order to extract rich details from the migrants' discourses. The emphasis of the analysis was placed on the lived experiences of migrants in call-centers operating in Romania. Facts gathered from the free-floating storytelling of the migrants were analyzed within the optic of the dual labor market system to reveal possible social stratification and labor market concentration patterns.

Apart from the small sample size, other limitations of this study can pertain to the research method being employed. While oral history narratives do provide insights obtained directly from the subject, which other research methods might not be able to provide that easily, this research lacks a double-check by other type of data obtained from other instruments. This research is purely qualitative; future research might benefit from triangulation, which could allow the use of various datasets, theories and methods in order to back up the narrative evidence. Another limitation could be the choice of conducting the oral history interviews online, per Zoom. Some authors claim that online interviews cannot create that level of trust and intimacy which can be achieved through face-to-face interviews (Livne and Bejarano 2021). If so, this research might have missed out important details from the labor experiences of migrants. Yet, on the other hand, other specialists consider that, *per contra*, online interviewing offers more familiarity and creates a more intimate atmosphere than face-to-face interviewing (Van Zeeland *et al.* 2021).

Short Biographies of the Migrants Interviewed

Two migration motivations have been identified among the six migrants selected for this research study: those who came to Romania to pursue their studies (Darcelle and Dabir, both in their twenties), and those who came to follow their Romanian spouse and who settled here with their families of choice (Milena, Stephanie, Sebastián, Gloria, all in their thirties and forties). The two students are here on their own; their families of origin have remained in the countries of origin. Darcelle came to Bucharest for her university studies, while Dabir has been in Romania for four years at the moment of conducting the oral history interview, having pursued high school studies in Bucharest as well. The other four migrants are all settled in various towns around the region of Transylvania. A common trait of them is that they all have at least two siblings in their countries of origin. The following are short biographies of the migrants who participated in the oral history interviews:

Darcelle (20 at the moment of the interview) is the only member of her family to have emigrated from Cameroon. Although adaptation to the new society wasn't easy for her, Darcelle thinks that the family back home provided her with lots of support. During her bachelor studies in Romania, Darcelle also worked for a very short period in a call-center, but had to quit the job because of time constraints. She currently focuses on her studies.

Dabir (26) moved from Yemen and came to Romania for his studies. He was a bachelor candidate in politechnical studies, but soon realized this didn't fit him, so at the moment of the interview he was investing in software programming training, as he intended to become a programmer. Dabir mentioned that getting on with the migration experience in Romania wasn't particularly difficult, since he was an internal migrant in Yemen as well, living away from his family for several years. Back home, he worked in the family business, and often counselled his father in entrepreneurial decision-making. In Romania, after a brief spell in a call-center, he also got roles in movie castings, which he says helped him a lot, especially in making new friends. At the moment of the interview, Dabir was in the middle of the recruitment process with an important IT company.

Milena (36) comes from Belarus, where she graduated in Philology (English and German). After graduation and after a short experience as a foreign language teacher, Milena decided to go work on a cruise ship. She did this for four years, during which she also met her future husband. She moved to Romania with her husband, with whom she has a little boy. Some health problems and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic meant some extra challenges for her in Romania.

Stephanie (37) comes from The Philippines, where she graduated in business and entrepreneurship. In her native country, she worked as a real estate broker. She met her husband online and, in 2019, she moved to Romania to marry him. Her greatest wish is to become a mother. In spite of having had two miscarriages in a row since moving to Romania, her will to become a mother gave her power and, at

the moment of the interview, she was on her way to finally giving birth. What Milena and Stephanie have in common is that they both reported to have had some difficulties in managing to get closer to Romanian people.

Sebastián (49) graduated computer sciences in Mexico and worked in the travel industry before meeting his wife with whom she moved to Romania. His greatest passion are the movies, of which he has an impressive collection. He likes to wander through what he calls a scenic Romanian nature and does not have problems in communicating with the locals, with whom he gets along well. He and his wife raise their two children trying to give them as much as possible from both cultures.

Finally, Gloria (45) comes from the Dominican Republic and has been in Romania for eight years at the moment of the interview. Although she worked as a university professor and as a researcher in medical science in her native country, as well as in the United States of America, she couldn't find a job in the Romanian healthcare system because her diplomas and qualifications were not recognized. After a brief spell in the call-center industry, during which she took a qualification course in nutrition, in Romania, she finally managed to get a job as a nutrition consultant. Her husband is Romanian and they raise two children.

RESULTS

Most of the migrants interviewed reported an ease of accessing call-center jobs, such as in the examples of Milena and Stephanie:

"It was very easy [to get employed]. I was looking for a job and I kept hearing about this call-center. I don't know, I had an interview piece of cake" (Milena).

"I guess yes [it was easy to get employed]. For this type of industry, companies will easily hire you because they are looking for an English speaker. I had experienced this type of industry, so it was easy for me to get the job" (Stephanie).

As they explained, Milena and Stephanie both obtained their call-center jobs in Romania relatively easy. If Stephanie already had some call-center experience gained in her native country, Milena didn't, but, still, she obtained the job without difficulties, not at least thanks to her fluency in Russian and English. The ease of access to call-center jobs was also reported by other interviewees. Darcelle didn't have any prior labor experience either, but the French language helped her access a call-center position. Similarly, Dabir and Gloria also obtained call-center jobs although their labor experiences were not related to the positions they actually applied for. The only one who had some job-related experience was Sebastián, an IT-graduate, who first found employment in Romania in a call-center related to IT, but even in his case, the last job in IT was nearly two decades ago:

“[The IT background helped], although I haven't been doing any it for the last 12 years, more than that. Because in Mexico, the last two jobs I had were related to tourism, with boats, and tours, and all that, so I stopped doing IT stuff back in 2003”.

These experiences show that accessing a call-center job is not particularly difficult. If the migrant applying for the job shows industriousness and has proper knowledge of the language used in the job opening, then obtaining the job tends to become easy:

“It wasn't related to IT. What they needed was language skills, English and Spanish. IT skills didn't matter because it wasn't related to IT” (Sebastián).

When asked about challenges that they encountered related to doing their call-center jobs, the migrants didn't report any particular ones. Although the strict procedures and routines in call-centers were mentioned, these seemed to be accepted as a given, as job characteristics. The challenges were rather contextual, such as Stephanie's, who was *“shocked to find out that the taxes are so high, almost 50%. It was challenging. In the Philippines, life is actually tough, but our taxes are not that high compared to Romania”*. Probably the biggest disappointments came from Gloria and to Darcelle, and both were related to the earnings. Gloria was unhappy to find out that foreigners were sometimes paid less than Romanians(?). This aspect was brought into discussion when I asked Gloria – non-labor related – if she felt, at any time, in any way, vulnerable during her stay in Romania. The only vulnerability she perceived was related to the two call-center experiences she had, because of the lower payments of foreigners compared to Romanians. This, as Gloria mentions, made her feel humiliated. Apart from Gloria's perceived humiliation, Darcelle chose to give up her job just three weeks into it, because she thought that the time sacrifices that she had to make for the job were not properly reflected in her payment.

As to any potential barriers to accessing call-center jobs, most migrants seemed to agree that destination language skills were an important issue. Thinking about how easy it was for fellow countryfolk of her to obtain a job in Romania, Stephanie mentioned that those who knew a little bit of Romanian could easily get a job. But, for newly arrived migrants, who didn't know the language, obtaining a job was more difficult. A similar opinion was shared by Sebastián, who also thought that, to get a good job, *“you need to speak the language, because mostly if you don't speak Romanian, you're bound to do call center work mostly”*.

In some of the cases, call-center jobs were only seen as temporary solutions until a better job or a better qualification were obtained. Darcelle thought that the call center job was the only real opportunity to access the local labor market, because students like her are restricted by labor law to part-time contracts. Darcelle and Dabir worked in call-centers during their studies, but, at some point, both have quit, in order to concentrate on their education. Also, Gloria decided to apply for

call-center jobs because her degree in medicine was not recognized in Romania; yet, she knew from the very beginning that working in call-centers would only be temporary until she completed the medical specialization course that she aimed for:

“I looked for work in a call center, because I wanted to do something [until I solved with the study documents and the job at the hospital]. My husband told me not to [bother myself], but me, who am used to working for a long time, don't feel good staying home and doing nothing”.

Both Gloria and Dabir had professional interests that were different than what they did in the call-center jobs, and, ultimately, decided to quit the jobs and to pursue their own interests. Darcelle as well concluded that instead of using her time in the call-center job, she better concentrated on her studies. Others, such as Milena, quit the call-center job for motherhood reasons, while Stephanie was soon going to enter maternity leave. The only one who was in a mid- to long-term employment contract at the moment of the interview was Sebastián.

When asked whether they thought that their skills were rightly appreciated on the Romanian labor market, the interviewees mostly answered affirmatively, yet while highlighting that probably the most important skill was language-related:

“Yes, I think so. Because Romania is not an English-speaking country, if you have that kind of [language] skill, you can easily find a job” (Stephanie).

“We spoke and heard Russian in the headphones, and at the same time we had to write on the computer in English, to do the coding of a case” (Milena).

All in all, it can be said that the migrants interviewed reported both positive and negative aspects of call center jobs. In the opinion of the interviewees, the chances of obtaining a call-center job are rather influenced by language and communication skills than by professional or educational experience.

DISCUSSIONS

The labor market conditions in Romania strongly impact upon the labor inclusion patterns of immigrants. Romania's development into an attractive destination for call-centers and help desks could have not remained without impact upon the migrants, who, thanks to such proliferation, can easily find jobs in call-center industries. At the same time, immigrants are well suited for call-center jobs due to their native language fluency and/or English language skills, but as well as – in some cases – to their internationally acquired labor experience.

Empirical evidence obtained from the interviews confirms Haouari and Laassri's (2020, 46–48) idea that call-centers take advantage of migrants' often desperate need of accessing a job, but also that securing employment in a call center is not necessarily difficult, as reported by Milena and Stephanie. This ease of access of migrants into call-center jobs corresponds to the idea that barriers to

accessing the secondary labor market or of mobility within the labor market are low or even not existing (Bruinekool 2013; Dale 1987; Hodson and Kaufman 1982). If the migrant masters English or another foreign language, then access to the secondary labor market becomes even easier. As it happens, the migrants interviewed stated that the access to the primary, but also to the secondary labor market is most of the times restricted by the lack of destination language skills, in this case Romanian. Stephanie perceives the ease of access on the labor market as depending on the language skills of the candidate (*"It depends on what skills they have"*), a perception shared by Sebastián, who thinks that *"to get a good job, you need to speak the language"*. Stephanie and Sebastián's opinions confirm that not knowing the language impedes migrants in accessing primary labor market jobs, and concentrates them into the secondary labor market. Zhang and Grenier (2013) consider this to be a form of discrimination that ultimately leads to marginalization: not having destination language skills, migrants are clustered into minority language groups, which restricts their access to the job market, and pushes them onto the secondary labor market, where, once arrived, migrants will have to accept the conditions imposed by the employer. In the case of the so-called *"electronic sweatshops"* (Sato 2018), migrants will have to deal with impoverished work content (Ripamonti and Galuppo 2016): some of the migrants soon understood that the sacrifices made were not worth it. Not only that the sacrifices and the workload are high, but the migrants employed in the secondary labor market are often regarded as dutiful executors of monotonous and repetitive tasks, based on pre-planned scripts, as reflected by opinions shared about having to type on the computer what was heard on the phone.

Call-center jobs in the secondary labor market though represent fitting positions for immigrants because of the fact that not few of the foreigners find it hard to match their formal qualifications with the requirements (or habits) of the Romanian labor market. Because their degrees or qualifications are not easily, nor directly transferable to the Romanian market, or recognized by the Romanian state, migrants turn to call-centers to find jobs that either replace the jobs that they would (and even should) have done with their qualifications, or that, at least, fill in the gap of time needed until migrants manage to have their degrees recognized by the Romanian state and apply for better jobs, as evidenced in the example of Gloria. Gloria's case is illustrative for Wilson's and Portes' (1980) claim that the secondary labor market tends to take on workers rejected from the primary market. The literature cites the lack of qualifications or low educational levels as important determinants of pushing migrants onto the secondary labor market (Ünlütürk-Ulutaş and Akbaş 2020, 197). The issue is accentuated the younger the migrant is. Darcelle mentioned that, as a student, a call-center job was, actually, the only real opportunity to get a job. Young migrants lack professional experience, which often constitutes a problem when seeking employment. Moreover, Heinz (1987) identified that the transition from the educational system onto the labor market is

oftentimes difficult. In the case of migrants, this complexity is even higher, if the lack of proficiency in Romanian or unrecognized diplomas are considered.

The secondary labor market is also known for the high turnover and the emotional burnout, resulting into precarious work conditions. Unsurprisingly, all immigrants interviewed have departed at least once from a call center job since their arrival in Romania. Some of them found employment with other call centers (Sebastián), others in other industries (Dabir, Gloria), while others yet did not seek further employment, choosing to pursue their studies (Darcelle) or to focus on their private lives (Milena, Stephanie). Sebastián changed jobs for professional ascension reasons, while Darcelle has quit the job because she didn't find it was worth it for the amount of time she invested in it. Milena and Stephanie focused on motherhood, while Gloria managed to get the medical job she always wanted to have.

The ease at which all of these migrants left their positions in the call-center indicates that these jobs are neither among the most stable, nor among the most promising or best paid, the employees not having much worm of conscience? in making the decision to quit the job. None of them seem to have been irreparably affected by the resignation from the call center: Stephanie and Sebastián have easily and quickly found a new call-center job, Dabir easily identified an employment opportunity with an IT company, Gloria eventually managed to obtain a position in the healthcare sector which she was striving for, Darcelle focused on her academic studies, while Milena dedicated her time to raising her child. Through these behaviors, the migrants interviewed demonstrate that jobs in call-centers are transient and do not necessarily offer ideal work conditions. Nevertheless, such jobs represent one of the easiest ways to enter the Romanian labor market and have the advantages of ensuring a stable income during employment, respectively of being a starting point for future jobs, even if they are not necessarily a long-term option. What is also worth pointing out is that migrants who are students tend to remain less in employment than married migrants, who occupied call-center positions for longer time.

CONCLUSIONS

According to the research results, migrants believe that the channeling towards the secondary labor market is determined by the lack of necessary language skills, the lack of sufficient professional experience and the fact that qualifications from the home society are not recognized in the host society. The lack of match between skills and occupation amplifies social stratification, pushing migrants even further towards jobs with low advancement opportunities or poor payment. As Darcelle described the labor-intensive business model of the secondary market, "*the time sacrifices [...] for the paid amount of money were not worth it*". Deskilling is also common among migrants in the secondary labor

market, as seen in Gloria's case, who took a job below her educational and skill levels, because she was unable to find employment that matched her qualifications. Nevertheless, while accepting the subpar job as a temporary solution, Gloria followed training and requalification courses that helped her land a job in the medical sector in which she was qualified from home. Other migrants, though, who lack language or professional skills, tend to remain anchored in the secondary labor market, in less than favorable employment situations, for some longer time. The call-center sector in Romania is an example of an overrepresentation of migrants in the secondary labor market, many migrants finding employment there, as a consequence of the previously mentioned reasons. Nonetheless, one important aspect identified from the stories of the interviewed migrants was that the call center sector provided easy exit possibilities, all of the six migrants having quit call-center jobs when the personal, social and labor conditions did not fit any longer. The high attrition rates specific for call center jobs (Abdullateef *et al.* 2010; Woydack 2019) actually represents an advantage for migrants, as it permits ease of entry and exit onto, and from the secondary labor market, thus keeping alive their employment opportunities in other sectors, including the primary labor market.

Note

At the beginning of each interview, the respondents were informed about the context in which the interviews were carried out and about the purpose of the discussion. The respondents were also informed that their answers will only be used in scientific (academic) purposes. Informed verbal consent was obtained from the participants. The real names of the respondents have been anonymized in this research article.

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Acest articol își propune să investigheze percepțiile migranților despre munca în centrele de contact din România. Dovezi narative sunt adunate din șase interviuri de istorie orală efectuate între iunie 2021 și ianuarie 2022 cu resortisanți ai țărilor terțe care locuiesc în România și care au avut experiențe de muncă în centre de apel din această țară. Cercetarea narativă este folosită pentru analiza și interpretarea experiențelor trăite de migranți. Rezultatele arată că lipsa cunoștințelor limbii române, a experienței profesionale suficiente și nerecunoașterea calificărilor din țara de origine sunt printre factorii despre care migranții consideră că le restrâng cel mai mult accesul pe piața primară a muncii și îi împing înspre piața secundară. Decalificarea este, de asemenea, obișnuită în rândul migranților, care acceptă locuri de muncă sub nivelul lor de calificare, pe piața secundară a muncii, din motive legate de statut. Cu toate acestea, dese schimbări de personal din centrele de apeluri pot fi privite ca un avantaj pentru migranți, permițându-le un acces ușor pe piața secundară, dar și o ieșire la fel de ușoară.

Cuvinte-cheie: piața duală a muncii; piața secundară a muncii; migrație; centre de apel; stratificare socială.

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