

INVESTIGATION OF WORKFORCE MOBILITY IN THE SOPRONKÖHIDA STRICT AND MEDIUM REGIME PRISON

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Abstract

There is a common opinion that the Hungarian society is "soil-bound", i. e. people are not able or are not ready to get out of their usual life and working environment even if they could live a better life in another place. This low-level mobility is especially conspicuous in the public sector. The authors studied in their research the horizontal institutional and vertical social mobility processes observable in a totally closed convict prison and career strategies that can be formulated by and for employees of a prison for male convicts at the Austrian border of Hungary. Results of a targeted survey show that, actually, there is no transfer for employees between individual convict prisons and even a full professional career can be planned and realized in the same convict prison with a good chance.

1. Introduction

After the accession to the European Union (2004), when separating role of borders has diminished, cross-border regions started developing and, by today, separator function of borders has greatly changed thus, towns' status has been reevaluated, and situation at the border became an advantage rather than a handicap due to economic, service and trade connections. County Győr-Moson-Sopron has had not only the lowest unemployment rate for years but this county is the winner of the inland migration [1].

More than 27 thousand cross-border commuters work in Austria, therefore, Western part of Hungary is the most popular in commuting due to geographic reasons. Based on the data of census 2011, 13.5 thousand people from county Győr-Moson-Sopron, almost 5 thousand persons from county Vas went to work to abroad, their decisive part to our Western neighbor [2]. Readiness of Hungarian employees to commuting increased considerably (by 26.2%) in the past 30 years at country level, this rise is outstandingly high among the female employees, amounting to an increase of 48%. The most mobile age group of the labor market is the „Y” generation (well-educated young people speaking foreign languages, most of them are single and have no real property on their own). More than 50% of them are ready to move even to-abroad for getting the ideal job as well as people working in specific branches such as physicians, specialized nurses and industrial skilled workers.

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Change of residence or not changing residence may have numerous reasons such as working, studies, family-related reasons, traffic conditions and differences between regions. In his paper, Ruzsonyi, Péter defines as a general problem the fact that "an essential part of employees of penal institutions do not live in the location of their workplace". They prefer commuting – implying several-hour journey every day distracting them from regeneration or family – or they live in lodging provided by the employer in long-term run [3]. This confirms the general fact that Hungarians are not good in changing residence, they prefer travelling every day or provisional change of dwelling. Nevertheless, we note here that in the case of the Sopronkőhida Strict and Medium Regime Prison included in the survey to be described below, 77.5% of employees live in the dwelling-houses built next to the penal institution or in Sopron; only 4.9% of employees declared that their dwelling was at a distance of min. 30 km from Sopronkőhida.

Based on the above facts, we can state that low-level employee mobility is one of the decisive characteristics of the Hungarian labor market. This "binding to location" has somewhat eased in the past period, mainly due to the increase of time spent to commuting and escalation of working abroad.

We formulated our hypotheses along the following questions:

What general trends and characteristics define the Hungarian labor market mobility and how are these trends confirmed by employees of penal institutions?

What kind of mobility differences can be found between the business sector and public sector?

What career model can be observed in a commissioned low enforcement organization?

How strongly are employees of one of the largest and oldest penal institutions bound to the particular location and to their workplace?

Is there any difference between female and male mobility in penal institutions?

Due to scope limitations, we concentrate in this study to confirmation of our hypothesis that in public sector, within it, in penal institutions, employee migration is even below the statistical average.

2. Method

In their earlier researches, the authors in detail discussed the boundary conditions, factors and specialties of the Hungarian labor market mobility, on the one hand, and explored the prison-geographic interrelations of the prison service, on the other. Labor mobility investigations aim mainly at detection of reasons of regional, social and economic disproportions, thus contributing to scientific justification of creating labor market equilibrium [4]. Prison-geography as an independent research field does researches at the following levels: a) International level; b) Country level, institutional level; c) Regional, institutional level; d) Regional, social level; e) Local level, prisoner level [5]. These surveys comprised country-wide and regional institutions, and within it, they focused on the labor mobilization of a particular penal institution. In addition to review of the previous researches and related literature and analysis of statistical data sets, we did an empiric survey in one of the oldest and largest national penal institutions for men in Hungary. At the time of the query (April 2014), the Prison in Sopronkőhida had 312 employees (15% officers, 73% under-officers, 12% public servants), 102 of them filled in and returned the questionnaire. This answer rate of 32.7% is regarded as a representative sample in terms of age, education and job held.

We can say about all penal institutions, thus also about the Prison in Sopronkőhida that they play an essential employment role in the life of a particular settlement. In Hungary, 2.3 employees fall upon one prisoner; this index is 2.2 employees per prisoner in Sopronkőhida. We note here that this institution with its 312 employees is one of the top employers in Sopron, and at the same time, one of the most stable workplaces due to the nature of the organization and aggravation of the policy of execution of sentences.

3. Results

3.1 Investigation of mobility of employees in the Sopronkőhida Strict and Medium Regime Prison

As mentioned above, prison service pays low salaries but provides stable "life-long" jobs. It is confirmed also by our survey as 58.8% of the persons involved in this query have been working in Sopronkőhida already for more than 5 years. 38% of the younger generation below 35 have been working for this institution for 5 years as a minimum, and this ratio is 74.6% among people above 35. The low fluctuation and poor mobility of employees are evidenced also by the fact that, practically, there is no movement within the institutions of the penal system, only 3 persons out of the respondents (2.9%) had already worked in another penal institution; all of them are below 35. This means that we hardly find a person that had worked in Győr, Szeged or Budapest within the staff of the penal institutions before applying for a particular job in Sopron. Based on this data, also the opposite situation occurs rarely and, obviously, for other reasons (such as move due to partner selection) that somebody from Sopronkőhida applies for a job in or for transfer to another institution.

In respect of gender, there is almost full conformity: 77% of men and 78% of women live either in Sopron or Sopronkőhida. Yet, we observed difference in the fact that although vast majority of men living in Sopron or Sopronkőhida (92.9%) and women (83%) have been living at their present addresses at least for 5 years, 58.6% of men and only 21.9% of women have been living in their present domiciles since their birth. Considering also the age specifications, we may assume that mobilization is motivated by setting up house together, and usually women move to the men's domicile and house and not men to women's flat. We have presumed that closeness of the penal system is manifested also in the fact that a large number of persons applying for a job in this institution have connections to the penal system within their families. This hypothesis has been confirmed because at least one parent of almost one person out of five respondents (20.6%) work or worked in Sopronkőhida. We have also stated that decisive part of employees live at the same place where they work or next to their workplace. Only 5 respondents (4.95%) live at a distance of more than 30 km from their workplace, and this is a low spatial mobility in the case of employees.

Based on our review, only 12.7% of respondents would move from their domiciles for a better life. Within this review, we wanted to obtain answer to the question, too, whether employees were ready to move to another location for the sake of a better life. This question is targeted to detect two attitudes as it may explain connection both to workplace and domicile being decisively the same in our case (Sopronkőhida is a part of Sopron, thus, they can be regarded as one settlement). Our results show a relative strong local binding: only 12.7% would be ready to move if they were able to do it actually. Most of them (34%) would move to abroad, within it to Austria (24%). As an interesting finding, 55% of respondents declared to have a secondary job and, out of them, every fourth person finds work in Austria. Based on the overall social gender roles and socioeconomic practice, it may not be surprising that 60% of men have a secondary job while, in the case of women, this ratio is 40% only.

4. Discussion

4.2 Major regional and employment characteristics of the Hungarian system of penal institutions

In general, we can say that number of prisoners is determined by cultural, social, economic and political decisions and has no correlation with social and economic development level of a country. In Hungary, there are about 18,400 prisoners (~180 per 100,000 inhabitants), and in international comparison, it is an outstandingly high, however, not extremely high value [6].

The Hungarian prison service is organized territorially with institutions with county-level, regional and country-wide competence. In Hungary, there are 14 penal institutions with national or

regional competence in the following settlements at present: Állampusztá, Balassagyarmat, Budapest, Tököl (juvenile penal institution), Kalocsa, Baracska, Márianosztra, Pálhalma, Sátoraljaújhely, Sopronkőhida, Szeged, Szombathely, Tiszalök, and Vác. In addition, institutions with county-level competence can be found in Budapest and in 13 counties (Baranya, Bács-Kiskun, Békés, Borsod, Győr-Moson-Sopron, Hajdú-Bihar, Heves, Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok, Somogy, Szabolcs, Tolna, Veszprém, and Zala), in each case in the chief town of the particular county. Territorially, institutions are not spread uniformly, thus, in Southern Transdanubia, there is no penal institution with national competence, being rather problematic in the Hungarian prison service.

Commissioned staff of penal institutions consists of officers, under-officers and ensigns and they have the following tasks: a) governance, command; b) finance and management; c) execution of sentence; d) security tasks; e) law enforcement. Tasks of persons working as public servants comprise fields of mental, psychic and social care as well as education and training.

A survey in 2013 stated that ratio of women and men was about 70/30%, just like to other law enforcement organs, and also our survey confirmed this number. According to a national survey, share of female managers is rather low in traditional penal institutions like the one in Sopronkőhida where this index is 17%. Women are engaged mainly in administrative and training-educational jobs and their chances for promotion are lower than in the case of men [7].

Following from the totalitarian nature of enforcement of sentences, nature of penal institutions as workplaces is rather close. Within an institution, most employees (such as supervisors and educators) are directly in the same space as the prisoners in decisive part of their working hours. This closed world of prisons results in a curious society where everybody has her/his place and role, and hierarchy is determined – in addition to physical strength – mainly by ownership of information, system of connections and financial resources. Obviously, not only prisoners but also their supervisors are parts of this closed world. This means that prisoners try to build up trustful connections with their supervisors, yet, infringe the rules and elude the system at any time and in any possible ways. Detailed description of conflict types among prisoners as well as between prisoners and their supervisors is beyond the scope of this study. We only mention here one of the most important risk and stress factors: overcrowding of institutions meaning also overload of employees. Based on 2013 data, degree of capacity utilization was 144.9% on average in Hungary. From this, the logical conclusion can be drawn that number of career escapers and fluctuation are in the Hungarian penal institutions obviously high, but it is not true, and it can be explained just with the poor mobilization ability. On 02.02.2015, staff consisted of 8,005 persons at a staffing level of 94% [8]. In the past years, number of new entries always surpassed the number of leavings (Fig. 1).

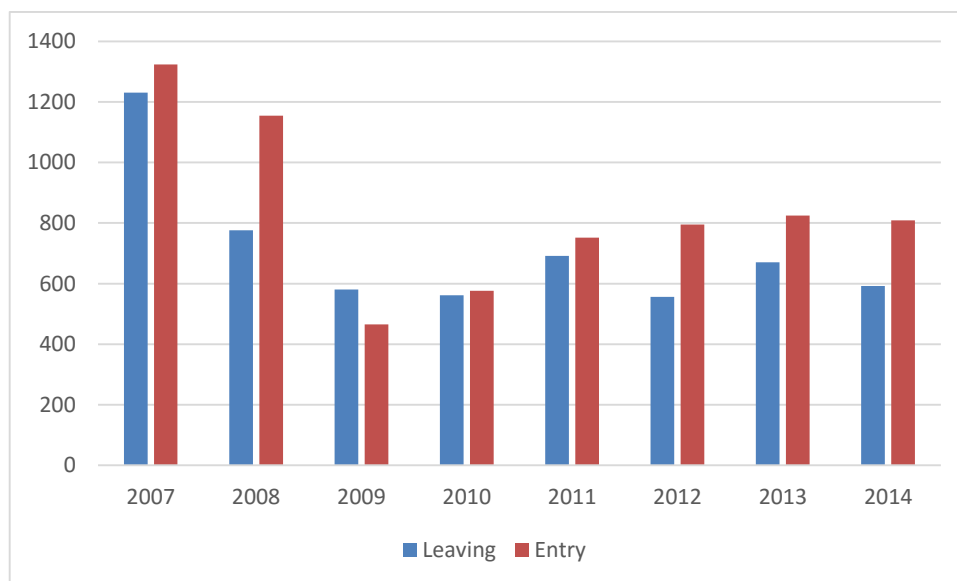


Fig. 1: Staff fluctuation in prison service

Source: own editing based on Yearbooks 2013 and 2014 of the Hungarian Prison Service

In 2014, about 8% of the staff exchanged – meaning low drop-out. Its main reason is that prison service offers one of the most stable workplaces and the most calculable career where number of prisoners and situation of the institutions allow planning a many-decade-career. At present, there is no sign that dismissals are expected, even more, continuous increase of staff number can be planned. There are few branches only where technological development or other external development factors threaten long-term and sustainable employment so little or not at all.

Strong local embedding of individual institutions may be attributed also to this fact. Prisons are major local employers, and a considerable part of their employees come to the institutions based on family traditions, i.e. working in prison is a cross-generation habit. Prison service has always been penetrated by a kind mysticism as, in a totally closed institution, flow of information is restricted and decisively one-sided. Because of closed character and shortage of information, a job seeker would not automatically take a prison as a possible workplace into consideration. Consequently, in typical case, a person becomes employee of an institution so that a relative of the person worked earlier or works at present there and the person has information and experience about the prison as a possible workplace.

5. Conclusions, suggestions

Our researches have confirmed that the Hungarian labor market mobility is rather low, and within some organizations of the public sector such as penal institutions, specific reasons can also be identified. Being an employee in this closed world of the prison service equals moderate but secure living, where there is almost no movement between the institutions. In mobilization of both genders can be hardly found any deviation, however, women can count on a career within the organization less than men. Due to the development level of micro-region Sopron-Fertőd and Austria as close neighbor, this institution is a less attractive workplace (there is continuous shortage of labor in this institution), but local embedding is strong, we can find traditional "prison service families". The new career model of this field came into force on 01.07.2015 and allowed a salary increase of 30% as first step. It may contribute to increase of attractiveness of this profession; however, it might be insufficient to induce mobility processes mitigating workforce disproportions.

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