European Journal of Law and Public Administration
ISSN: 2360-6754 | e-ISSN: 2559-7671
Covered in: Erih Plus; HeinOnline; CEEOL; RePEc; CrossRef; Google Scholar; KVK; WorldCat; ICI Journals Master List - Index Copernicus; EBSCO.

2025, Volume 12, Issue 1, pages: 119-144 | https://doi.org/10.18662/eljpa/12.1/260

Role of University in Supporting the Professional Integration of Minority-Language-Trained Social Workers

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Abstract: *This study presents the findings of a qualitative exploratory research project, based on a secondary analysis of three complementary datasets collected between 2014 and 2017. It focuses on the professional integration of social work graduates trained in a minority language. The research is explanatory in nature and employs a constructivist grounded theory approach, reanalyzing qualitative data from open-ended questionnaires and interviews with social work graduates, as well as interviews with employers. The aim was to explore how higher education institutions can support the labor market integration of minority-language-trained professionals in multicultural and multilingual contexts.*

The reanalysis process included open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. A central analytical category was identified: "Challenges of professional integration in a multicultural and multilingual context." This served as the foundation for developing an emergent theory and four strategic dimensions describing how universities can better facilitate graduates' transition into the workforce: 1. Development of language and communication competencies, 2. Balancing theoretical and practical training with labor market demands, 3. Collaboration between the university and specialized institutions, and 4. Providing practical training and developing competencies for multicultural environments. The findings highlight the institutional responsibility of higher education in addressing the integration challenges faced by minority-language-trained professionals.

Keywords: *social work graduates; professional integration; higher education; minority-language education; role of university.*

How to cite: Balla, E. (2025). Role of university in supporting the professional integration of minority-language-trained social workers. *European Journal of Law and Public Administration, 12*(1), 119-144. https://doi.org/10.18662/eljpa/12.1/260

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Introduction

This study presents the results of a secondary data analysis conducted using a mixed-methods research framework, with a focus on the qualitative component. The qualitative research is exploratory in nature. The analysis is based on the reuse of data from three previous studies concerning the labor market situation of graduates in the field of social work, trained in Hungarian language at Partium Christian University (PCU) in Oradea. The university was established in the year 2000, in Oradea, as the legal successor of the Reformed Higher Institute "Sulyok István", which was the first higher education institution in Romania to offer instruction in the Hungarian language (Gál & Pásztor, 2024; Belényi et al., 2011).

From its very first year of operation, it provided training for social workers within the dual specialization of Reformed Didactic Theology – Social Work, with a five-year training duration (Belényi et al., 2011). Due to changes in the legislative framework, the specialization underwent several modifications, which on one hand affected the duration of university training, and on the other hand made it possible to introduce the single specialization in social work. In 2005, with the introduction of the Bologna system, the university-level training of social workers was adjusted to a three-year program. Currently, PCU offers 15 undergraduate specializations, including social work, and 7 master's degree programs (Gál & Pásztor, 2024).

The secondary analysis starts from pre-existing data collected for earlier studies. However, its purpose differs from that of the original research and involves reinterpreting data from a new analytical perspective (Heaton, 1998; Irwin & Winterton, 2011; Dufour & Richard, 2019). While the primary studies mainly aimed to describe the professional situation of the graduates, the current secondary analysis seeks a deeper and more focused understanding. Its goal is to highlight how the training university can support the professional integration of Hungarian-speaking graduates in a multicultural and multilingual context.

The results shows that the social worker graduates considered proper their university training for professional activities. However, it was highlighted the need to increase and diversify practice-based learning, and to focus on a better knowledge of the legislation. The language competencies, especially proficiency in Romanian and professional terminology, are considered essential by both graduates and employers. Although Hungarian is not an official selection criterion, it can offer practical advantages when working with clients from the Hungarian minority, particularly in private

institutions. Key soft skills such as empathy, teamwork, and critical thinking were considered vital for successful practice in social work.

Literature review

The efficient transition from university training to labor market is possible through high quality study program. In this context, the universities should integrate theoretical and practical knowledge (Săveanu at al., 2017)

Social work education is constantly evolving to provide students with the best possible professional training (Rentea et al., 2024). This training must prepare future professionals to provide quality services to clients.

In the field of social work, it is essential for professionals to develop effective communication skills (Reith-Hall & Montgomery, 2023) in order to ensure professional collaboration with the beneficiaries of social services. Although the existing research did not sufficiently highlighted how can be the communication effectively learned, the authors believe that social worker training needs to include practice opportunities for these skills "in a simulated (or real) environment."

Several studies discuss the practical application of the theoretical knowledge acquired in the university training of social workers. According to these studies, academic training should place greater emphasis on connecting theory with practice and learn to apply the theoretical knowledge in practice.

Research shows, that graduates considered necessarily to learn more about the practical appliance of the theoretical knowledge in the field of social work. Some practical knowledge is constantly changing, so it cannot be integrated into the university curriculum. Therefore, social workers must learn specific practical skills at work (Voll at al., 2022).

In a study published in 2020, the authors (Lazăr et al., 2020) present the results of a research conducted by the National College of Social Workers (with the support of UNICEF, in 2018), which sought to identify barriers and bottlenecks in the social work system, as well as ways to attract social workers to rural areas. Focus groups were organized with social workers and professionals from all regions of the country.

According to the results, a few difficulties and problems faced by social service professionals were identified. These include difficulties in inter-institutional cooperation, lack of understanding on the part of superiors, lack of supervision and continuous training, high workload, low salaries (especially in the private sector), lack of uniform working methodologies, excessive bureaucracy, and numerous unnecessary forms.

Proposals to address these issues focus on professionalizing and strengthening the status of social workers, continuing professional training and supervision, developing social services at the local level, improving institutional management, as well as legislative regulations, working methodologies, and support for work in schools.

The authors (Lazăr et al., 2020) also made proposals for the higher education system in the field of social work. These include revising the content of training programs (e.g., adapting to legislative changes, correlating theory with practice), organizing student activities (such as increasing the number of practice hours in accredited institutions, grouping them into dedicated weeks, introducing internships in the field, establishing criteria for selecting candidates), as well as collaboration with social service providers (improving collaboration, actively involving students in practice and relevant activities, encouraging National College of Social Workers members to mentor students in practice).

According to the results of a survey conducted among social workers in Braşov County (Romania) employed by local councils, the research focused on several dimensions: level of training, perception of work, challenges encountered, job satisfaction, and suggestions for improvement.

The authors (Csesznek & Şimon, 2019) highlighted the most common problems identified by respondents: heavy workload, excessive focus on administrative activities, low number of professionals, lack of a work team, especially in communities where there is only one specialist, difficulties in communicating with certain groups of clients, stress, insufficient recognition of the profession, and dissatisfaction with remuneration.

Stress is exacerbated by the lack of coping strategies to combat it at both the personal and institutional levels, which can lead to professional burnout, demotivation, and the intention to leave the field. For more effective work, respondents proposed: hiring qualified staff, simplifying legislation and bureaucracy, and improving working conditions. (Csesznek & Şimon, 2019)

Other research shows that Romanian universities manage to provide the necessary theoretical knowledge, but not the practical skills required. There is a gap between the educational offer and professional requirements; thus, most graduates acquire the competencies and skills needed for professional activities at the workplace rather than during their university studies. Therefore, is highlighted the importance of additional training courses (Voicu at al., 2010).

Methodology

The reanalyzed data originated from three complementary studies conducted between 2014 and 2017, which generated both quantitative and qualitative data. Although the secondary analysis focused exclusively on open-ended responses (qualitative data), the overall research framework was mixed methods, as the data were collected through an initial study that employed both closed- and open-ended questionnaires, as well as interviews with students and employers. Therefore, the secondary analysis can be considered part of a mixed-methods approach, with an emphasis on the qualitative component. The analysis contains only the complete responses to the open-ended questionnaires, and in the case of the interviews, only those who consent that their data would be processed and used for academic purpose. The secondary analysis included data from the following studies:

Study 1 (2014): Questionnaire-based research

This study involved 347 social work graduates (out of 412 distributed questionnaires) who graduated between 1996 and 2013 at PCU. The instrument was a questionnaire containing 23 closed-ended and 4 open-ended questions. The domains investigated included: demographic data, educational and professional trajectory, perceptions of university training, and suggestions for improvement. Initial data processing used descriptive statistical analysis for the closed-ended questions and Grounded Theory analysis for the open-ended responses.

Study 2 (2016): Interviews with graduates

In this phase, 41 interviews were conducted with graduates of Partium Christian University. Participants were categorized into three groups: graduates employed in their field of study (social work or education, e.g., religion teachers in the case of the double major in Reformed Theology and Social Work), former social workers who had changed their field of activity, and graduates who had never worked in their field of study. Semi-structured interviews were used, and the data were analyzed using the Grounded Theory method.

Study 3 (2017): Interviews with employers

The final study involved individual interviews with 11 employers or representatives of institutions that had collaborated with university graduates. Domains investigated included: professional expectations of social workers, evaluation of professional training, identified issues in graduate preparation, aspects of recruitment and employment, and perceptions of the university's role in the professional integration process.

Semi-structured interviews were used, and the data were analyzed using the Grounded Theory method.

Data integration involved a systematic process of categorical reconfiguration, documented in tabular format and presented in the subchapter dedicated to secondary data analysis. The secondary analysis followed a constructivist grounded theory approach and included the following steps:

- Initial review and open coding: The original 29 categories identified in the primary studies were adopted, along with their associated in-vivo quotations. These categories were not re-coded but served as the starting point for further conceptual development.
- Pre-axial thematic grouping: The 29 categories were grouped into 7 broader thematic clusters to facilitate interpretation. This step served as a bridge between open and axial coding and was documented in a summary table.
- Axial coding: The 7 thematic clusters were further analyzed and reorganized into 3 overarching analytical categories, based on conceptual relationships and recurring patterns. This step involved identifying connections between categories and refining their properties and dimensions.
- Selective coding and theory development: A central category, Challenges of professional integration in a multicultural and multilingual context, was identified. This category integrated the analytical structure and served as the foundation for the emergent theory. Based on this, four strategic dimensions were formulated to describe how the university can support the professional integration of minority-language-trained social work graduates.

According to the constructivist grounded theory approach, categories are constructed through researcher interpretation rather than being merely descriptive, considering contextual and discursive particularities (in-vivo structures) (Charmaz, 2008; Sandu, 2018). The starting point was the initial categories identified in the primary studies, but the analysis aimed to develop a new theoretical perspective focused on the institutional role of the university in professional integration.

Special attention was given to the interpretation process, aiming to achieve a comprehensive analysis of the available data without collecting new information. In quality research, the sample size is not determined by statistical representativeness but by theoretical saturation. In the three analyzed studies, no new categories emerged during the analysis process, therefore it was not needed to include additional data. This indicates that theoretical saturation was achieved (Charmaz, 2008). Consequently, the 29 initial categories were reanalyzed and grouped into 7 new categories during axial coding, ensuring that all original categories were incorporated into the

new organizational structure. These were analyzed from three complementary analytical perspectives:

- Professional training – curriculum, acquired competencies, quality of education
- Challenges – difficulties encountered by graduates in professional integration
- Support – forms of support provided or needed from the university

This structure provided the foundation for identifying the central category, *Challenges of professional integration in a multicultural and multilingual context*, and for developing the emergent theory and strategic recommendations.

In the third stage of coding, selective coding, the central category and the relationships between categories were established, followed by the formulation of the emergent theory.

Finally, based on the conducted analysis, four strategic dimensions were described to highlight how the university can support the professional integration of social work graduates trained in a minority language.

Several measures were taken to ensure the quality and trustworthiness of the secondary analysis. First, data triangulation was applied by integrating three distinct sources: open-ended questionnaire responses from graduates, interviews with graduates, and interviews with employers. Although two of these sources reflect the perspectives of graduates, they differ in format and depth, while the third provides an external institutional viewpoint. This combination allowed a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

Although the dataset used in the secondary analysis was pre-existing and no new data were collected, the principle of theoretical saturation was still relevant. I considered that theoretical saturation was achieves, as during the coding and reorganization process, no new categories emerged beyond those already identified.

The use of in-vivo codes helped preserve the participants' original expressions and ensured that the categories remained grounded in the data. Reflexive practices were employed throughout the analysis process to maintain consistency and transparency in interpretation.

Throughout the secondary analysis, the results were presented through a comparative approach between the data from the different sources analyzed. This approach enabled the identification of new dimensions of the university's role compared to the initial analyses, which

presented the results of the three studies separately with focus on the professionals' situation on the labor market.

Results

As I presented in the methodological part of the study, the secondary analysis started with the collection of the data from the previous three studies. To differentiate the sources in the presentation of the results, for the in-vivo structures a notation system was used: graduate, year, and specialization – for the answers to open-ended questions; interview no., graduate, year, and specialization – for the interviews with graduates; and interview no. – for the interviews with employers.

In the open coding phase, I started to re-organize the identified 29 categories in 7 new categories. The analysis of the obtained categories was made based on three perspectives, as presented in the figure below.

Table 1. Reorganization of initial categories during the open coding phase across three sources

Open-ended questions	Graduate interviews	Employer interviews
1. The role of language skills in social work practice		
Development of language skills	The need to study foreign languages for professional practice	Usefulness of languages in social work practice
	Impact of Romanian language proficiency in the context of multicultural practice	
	The language in which studies were completed is not important for the success of the job interview	
2. Curriculum content and theoretical foundation		
Theoretical knowledge	Usefulness of knowledge for entering the labor market	Differences in expectations toward graduates of the old system vs. the Bologna system
		Employers' opinions on the qualification of current social work graduates
3. The role of practical training in educating social workers		
Importance of volunteering	Professional experience	
Correlation between theory	Usefulness of competencies in professional practice	

and practice		
	Development of social work education and training programs	
4. Development of professional competencies and skills		
Managerial skills	The competency system in social work	Employers' expectations regarding the preparation of social work graduates
Relationship between employability and professionalism	Being a good professional	Knowledge and skills important for a social worker
	Employers' expectations through the lens of graduates	
5. Challenges in professional integration and retention in the field		
	Problems encountered during the hiring process	Shortcomings in the training of social work specialists
	Reason for employment in a different field	Continuous development and training of graduates
	Reason for changing career field	Problems faced by social workers
	Intention to work in the field of social work	
6. Support mechanisms for the professional integration of graduates		
	Facilitating the employment of graduates	Recruitment and hiring of graduates
		Retention of social workers in the field
		Methods to improve the status and prestige of the social worker
7. Institutional support for graduate employment and career development		
School–social work institutions relationship	Need for deepening knowledge	Connection between specialized institutions and universities
		The role of higher education institutions in the employability of social work graduates

Source: Author's own concept based on processed research data.

Continuing the analysis of the data, in the axial coding stages the above-mentioned seven categories were group in more generalized

categories as follows: professional training of social workers, challenges in the professional integration of social workers, and institutional support for the professional integration of social workers. The result of the axial coding stages is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Presentation of the categories emerged in the axial coding stages



Source: Author's own concept based on processed research data.

In the following, I will present the three categories that emerged from this stage of the analysis.

1. Professional Training of Social Workers

To develop theory and formulate conclusions regarding the university`s role I begin by explaining the relationships between the categories identified during the axial coding phase.

The importance of language competencies emerged as a significant element in the views of both graduates and employers, having a notable impact on professional activities, collaboration, and the deepening of social workers' personal experiences.

Foreign language proficiency is key factor in international collaborations and relationships, as well as in attracting the necessary funding for implementing specialized programs. This is particularly relevant in the case of private institutions.

Without knowledge of foreign languages, a social worker will struggle greatly, especially when it comes to projects that are vital for private institutions. (Interview 2, graduate of 2013, Social Work)

Moreover, partnerships with specialized institutions abroad are seen as opportunities for gaining experience and developing language skills, which contribute to professional advancement.

...collaborating with as many specialized institutions as possible. Ensuring the accumulation of experience both in domestic and international institutions would compel students to place greater emphasis on learning languages. (Graduate of 2008, Social Work)

According to the findings, language competencies play an important role in the recruitment and selection process for employment in the field. Although professional training is the decisive factor in hiring, and in some cases the language of study did not play a significant role, initial bias was observed against Hungarian-trained graduates.

I was afraid during the interview that I might be rejected because I graduated in Hungarian, but fortunately, I realized during the interview that they didn't care about that — what mattered more were the knowledge I possess and the laws I am familiar with. (Interview 21, graduate of 2009, Social Work)

This bias diminishes when candidates demonstrate necessary knowledge, which is not necessarily tied to proficiency in Romanian, but rather to mastery of professional terminology.

Emphasis must be placed on acquiring specialized language... (Graduate of 2010, Social Work)

Strong language skills and solid professional training help eliminate perceived barriers in the selection process for social work positions.

Although language competencies are not always a mandatory requirement in the hiring process, the data show that both employers and graduates perceive them as an advantage. In multilingual environments or international collaborations, knowledge of Romanian and foreign languages becomes essential for professional integration and task fulfillment.

There is a prejudice regarding the level of language competence (in Romanian), which stems from the association with the language in which the studies were completed. However, once we demonstrate mastery of the Romanian language, the prejudices disappear. (Interview 6, graduate of 2011, Social Work)

Language proficiency is thus seen as an asset that can offer a competitive edge in the selection process.

The analysis also highlighted another important factor in the selection process: candidate experience, which sometimes outweighed knowledge level acquired during university training.

I was well prepared, but employers didn't focus on that — they were only interested in experience. They didn't really care about the level of knowledge. (Interview 12, graduate of 2007, Social Work)

Theoretical training is nevertheless considered highly important for professional integration. Theoretical knowledge forms the foundation of professional training, and in the field of social work, the most relevant

subjects are those directly related to the sector. The relevance of these disciplines is confirmed by the personal experiences of social workers. Positive perceptions of knowledge acquired during studies contribute to professional fulfillment.

I use the knowledge related to child welfare and, implicitly, family social work on a daily basis. (Graduate of 2006, Reformed Theology – Social Work)

I applied the community social work textbook word for word in practice. (Interview 5, graduate of 1997, Reformed Theology – Social Work)

Graduates consider legal knowledge to be fundamental to professional practice. These skills are applied successfully in daily practice, suggestions were made to improve this knowledge to better address professional challenges and responsibilities.

I started working with children, and what I had learned was very helpful — especially the legal knowledge! (Interview 12, graduate of 2007, Social Work)

Greater emphasis should be placed on law classes and on acquiring legal knowledge. (Graduate of 2007, Reformed Theology – Social Work)

Regarding practical training, it plays a crucial role in university education in social work. Based on the analyzed data, graduates clearly emphasize that practical training is indispensable for understanding the social services system and acquiring the knowledge and competencies necessary for daily professional activities.

There is a need for even more specialized practical training for proper preparation — what the university curriculum provides is not enough. (Interview 10, graduate of 2008, Reformed Theology – Social Work)

Active student participation in internships is essential and avoiding absences and maintaining conscious presence are part of professional development, highlighting the importance of seriousness and conscientiousness among future graduates.

The number of internship hours is not considered sufficient in such a broad field. Therefore, there is a recognized need to increase the duration of specialized practice, to introduce longer internships and diversify its content, ensuring deeper understanding of administrative and documentation tasks.

Emphasis should be placed on practical training, ensuring that students know and can apply the documents used in the field — such as writing reports, case studies, social inquiries, etc. (Interview 10, graduate of 2008, Reformed Theology – Social Work)

Ideally, a full year of practice should be introduced before graduation. (Interview 11, graduate of 2011, Social Work)

Strengthening professional cooperation (with institutions and experienced professionals) is seen as an opportunity to gain field experience,

which can be complemented by volunteer work and other extracurricular activities (seminars, professional circles, research, charitable events).

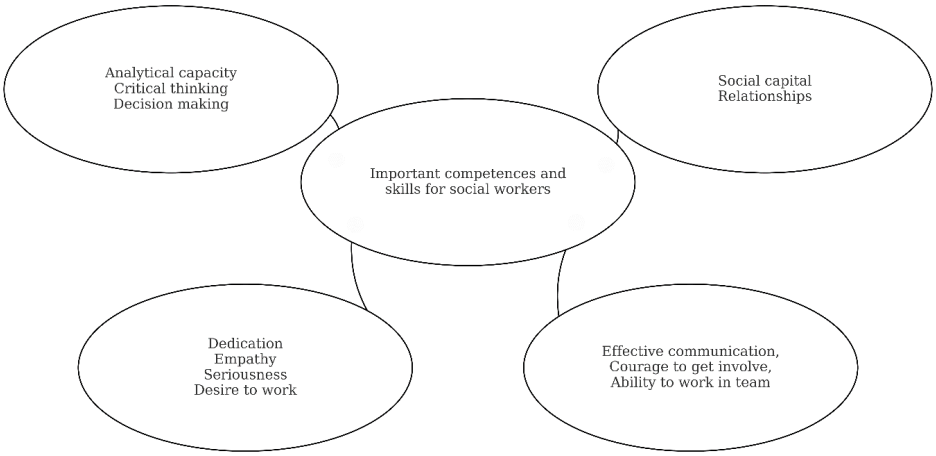
They should volunteer and get involved in as many research activities, projects, and event organizations as possible… they will only benefit from it. (Graduate of 2008, Social Work)

Thus, building professional relationships and participating in community life can be key elements in students' professional development.

An even better collaboration with social work institutions and the professionals within them is needed, in order to identify opportunities for internships and volunteering. (Interview 8, graduate of 2010, Social Work)

From the graduates' perspective, professional activity in social work requires a wide range of competencies and skills that must be developed during university training. Graduates emphasized the importance of analytical capacity, critical thinking, and decision-making, skills essential for managing complex situations and guiding clients toward appropriate solutions.

Figure 2. Important competences and skills for social workers in the perception of the graduates



Source: Author's own concept based on processed research data.

The graduates also highlighted the role of social capital and relationships developed during their studies as valuable resources for enhancing professional efficiency. Dedication, empathy, seriousness, and a desire to work with people are seen as essential traits for professional success. Effective communication, the courage to get involved, and the

ability to work in a team are also decisive factors in achieving professional success, as presented in Figure 2.

Graduates acknowledge that the university cannot prepare students for every real-life situation, but they believe its fundamental role is to develop adaptability, initiative, and autonomy.

The university cannot teach us everything; its role is to prepare students, to make them capable, to develop the necessary skills and competencies so that they are able to respond to the challenges encountered during their activities and to solve them. (Graduate of 2009, Social Work)

In conclusion, the competencies developed during training can make a difference in the labor market: *If you are good, they will fight to hire you. (Graduate of 2006, Reformed Theology – Social Work)*

On the other hand, according to employers, the most important characteristic of social workers is motivation, which contributes to a higher level of dedication. Additionally, organizational skills, independence, and the ability to make responsible decisions support the professional integration of social workers. Thus, employers also emphasized that professional success is not influenced solely by theoretical knowledge but also by the practical skills of the professionals.

Regarding language competencies, employers consider proficiency in Romanian and at least one foreign language essential for the professional activity of social workers.

Knowledge of the Romanian language is very important, as well as knowledge of a foreign language – English or German. (interview 3)

In a multilingual context, knowledge of Hungarian is particularly important in institutions where the majority of the clients are of Hungarian ethnicity. In predominantly Romanian-speaking environments, this competence is not a selection criterion for professional integration, but it is seen as an advantage in the context of services provided to minority groups.

There is a need for... knowledge of Romanian and Hungarian (of course, knowledge of Hungarian cannot be a selection criterion, but the candidate must understand that in the vast majority of cases, the beneficiaries are not Romanian speakers, so they will not manage otherwise). (interview 2)

I must mention that in Bihor County, our beneficiaries are Hungarian-speaking children, and they are enrolled in Hungarian-language education, which can make collaboration with the University of Oradea more difficult. (interview 3)

Moreover, mastery of professional terminology is considered a key competency for professional integration and the fulfillment of administrative tasks.

They should know and master the specialized terminology. (interview 5)

Unlike graduates, employers do not have a unified opinion regarding the curriculum content and theoretical foundation of university training. This divergence is attributed to the lack of a clear vision of academic education. Some employers, former graduates of four- or five-year programs, believe that current graduates from the Bologna system are less well-prepared.

Others, however, appreciate the graduates training based on direct collaboration experiences. In general, expectations toward social work graduates have evolved over time, influenced by legislative changes, the nature of the work, and the complexity of the field.

Nevertheless, the data suggest the need to diversify university training content by ensuring that students become familiar with the documents used in social work practice, so they are prepared to apply them upon entering the labor market.

It would be good if, during their university years, they also learned how to use documents, what types of documents are used and how to fill them out. (interview 1)

...over the years, due to legislative changes, we have been forced to introduce a series of administrative activities that must be carried out. (interview 8)

Employers also believe that the most important requirement is for social workers to have solid legal knowledge, even though the laws they work with are subject to change. They consider it essential for professionals to be able to navigate legislation in order to provide appropriate support.

The most important thing is to have knowledge of legislation; without knowing the laws in force, we cannot meet the requirements of the workplace, nor can we take action without them. (interview 10)

2. Challenges in the Professional Integration of Social Workers

According to graduates, the greatest challenge is acquiring adequate knowledge of the legislation specific to the field. As previously discussed, legal knowledge is a key element in daily professional activities. The same findings revealed that these are the only competencies tested during the hiring process in public institutions.

Everywhere we work with people, yet nowhere are we asked for knowledge related to this activity, only laws, laws, and more laws. (interview 12, graduate of 2007, Social Work)

In this context, legal knowledge surpasses the importance of other domain-specific competencies. Furthermore, there were cases where graduates felt their understanding of the legislation was insufficient for performing professional tasks.

I wasn't well prepared because I didn't know the laws well... (interview 18, graduate of 2012, Social Work)

Deepening this knowledge can be particularly challenging for graduates who lack formal education in Romanian, which hinders their ability to comprehend and apply legal frameworks in practice.

Another challenge in professional integration is the lack of experience, which can complicate both the hiring process and professional performance. According to the data, this lack of experience can be mitigated through student involvement in various volunteer activities. Volunteer contracts are seen as a way to increase employment opportunities in the field.

I wanted to apply for a position within DGASPC, but I had no experience and no volunteer contract… I didn't stand a chance. (interview 10, graduate of 2008, Social Work)

Employment in the field of study may be hindered by the limited availability, or complete absence, of job openings specific to social work. In such cases, graduates may be redirected toward other fields, either related or entirely different from their university training. For example, some graduates were able to work in education as religion teachers, benefiting from their dual academic background. Although these graduates are employed in a field related to their studies, they are not working within the social work sector.

The data also revealed that some graduates never attempted to seek employment in social work. Some were already employed during their university studies and chose to remain in those positions after graduation, while others, due to personal or family reasons, pursued different career paths from the outset. This issue appears to be more related to career orientation than to challenges in professional integration.

In certain cases, social workers decided to change fields due to burnout or because they were employed in temporary positions.

I could no longer cope with the overload; I had far too much work, beyond my capacity, as it was a locality with a population of over 13,000 people, 40% of whom were of Roma ethnicity. (interview 29, graduate of 2007, Reformed Theology – Social Work)

The data indicated that other reasons for leaving the field included lack of personal and financial motivation, as well as the decision to move abroad in search of better income.

Employers also highlighted issues related to graduates' lack of motivation. While motivation to work in the field is considered important, some employers encountered graduates who were disinterested and unmotivated.

I only see the young people who come to us for internships, they are uninterested and lack motivation. (interview 7)

In situations where specialized institutions have limited financial resources, they are unable to adequately support these unmotivated graduates.

According to employers, some graduates demonstrate weak practical preparation, low stress tolerance, or limited capacity to generate new ideas. These aspects, such as lack of initiative, can hinder both professional insertion and long-term retention in the workforce.

There is too little practical training during university years, and it lacks diversity. These aspects should be improved so that future social workers are better prepared for the various fields of activity within social work. (interview 10)

Passivity and difficulty adapting to the workplace are also seen as challenges among certain graduates. The data suggest that volunteering or probation periods can help graduates adjust and provide both graduates and employers with a clearer perspective on potential collaboration.

Employers consider stress and burnout to be major issues in the field of social work, regardless of the sector in which the specialist is employed.

Legislation requires the supervision of staff. In general, this supervision is carried out by contracted specialists and is conducted only in groups. (interview 2)

Supervision is viewed as an effective solution in this context. However, outside of public institutions with dedicated budgets, private institutions often face financial challenges in implementing supervision.

We hired a psychologist who helps social workers manage stress. (interview 3)

As a priest, I take care of the spiritual side and try to support our colleagues, but what I do is not supervision. (interview 8)

In such cases, alternative methods are used to support social workers. If these methods prove insufficient, or if professionals are involved in both direct service provision and administrative or project coordination tasks, the risk of burnout becomes imminent.

Burnout is a major issue in the profession. Social workers who, in addition to administrative duties, are involved in projects or accreditations face legislative changes that often complicate the tasks related to these activities and double the workload. (interview 7)

Additionally, employers believe that the social perception of the profession represents another obstacle to improving the employment process for social workers. The issue lies in the lack of proper appreciation for the value of these professionals, which stems from the public's limited understanding of the competencies held by university-trained professionals in this field. Improving this perception could contribute to a better societal image of the profession and, consequently, enhance the employment rate of professionals.

At the national level, there should be campaigns to effectively show what the work of a social worker entails and the emotional effort it involves. (interview 10)

3. Institutional Support for the Professional Integration of Social Workers

According to graduates, the most important factor in facilitating the integration of social workers is aligning professional training with labor market requirements. They believe that during their education, attention should be paid to the tasks students perform during internships, and where necessary, better alignment with these tasks should be ensured.

Theoretical training is very important, but greater emphasis should be placed on practical training and on the tasks assigned to students during their practical formation. (interview 12, graduate of 2007, Social Work)

The data also emphasized the importance of continuing education, through different forms, like professional training courses, which are relevant for career advancement.

Continuous training is necessary. I read a lot of specialized literature; I have attended many specialization courses in the field… I have completed a series of specialization courses. (interview 5, graduate of 1997, Reformed Theology – Social Work)

From the employers' perspective, professional integration can be supported through internships. The data show that some employers prefer to recruit professionals from among graduates with whom they have already developed professional relationships: *...we try to recruit from among the students who completed their internship with us. (Interview 1)*

Therefore, collaborations between training universities and specialized institutions are of significant importance.

In many cases, specialized institutions have signed cooperation agreements with training universities in Oradea. These agreements primarily concern the organization of student internships, but also include professional events and joint project involvement. *We have a collaboration agreement with Partium Christian University, we offer the possibility to carry out internships, and we have participated in joint projects and conferences. (interview 3)*

The religious character of some private institutions, as well as the ethnic background of their clients, may favor collaboration with higher education institutions such as Partium Christian University.

We are part of a Reformed religious community and have collaborative ties with Partium Christian University… (interview 7)

In such cases, the likelihood of employing Hungarian-speaking graduates increases. However, this advantage appears to be specific to certain institutional contexts and cannot be generalized to all universities or fields.

Specialized institutions benefit from professional collaborations with training universities and often request their assistance when vacancies arise. Employers believe it would be highly beneficial if universities issued personalized written recommendations for candidates applying to these positions.

The university could issue a written recommendation after graduation, which should be more personalized. The recommendation should be made by professors who know the student's abilities. A kind of career guidance in the field of social work. (interview 6)

Employers also believe that more emphasis should be placed on improving the public image of the social work profession. They argue that better practical training and stronger state support for private institutions are needed. Financial support could reduce operational difficulties and increase both job satisfaction and professional recognition for social workers. Moreover, public recognition and respect for social workers could be enhanced through greater visibility and promotion.

Another important aspect in both hiring and retaining professionals is the existence of motivational systems and opportunities for career advancement. In this context, employers believe that these factors, whether financial incentives, a supportive work environment, or international exchange programs, can serve as support mechanisms. All of these methods can contribute to both personal and professional satisfaction for social workers.

According to the data, some employers believe that reducing professionals' workload and better defining professional responsibilities would alleviate burnout and increase the desire to remain in the field.

The data show that employers consider membership in the National College of Social Workers (CNASR) to be important. In one case, this even contributed to the establishment of a county branch. These aspects are important because CNASR is a professional body regulates, supports, and represents the interests of professionals and acts to enhance their prestige and development in accordance with the national legislation. (Parliament of Romania (2004), Law No. 466/2004 on the Status of the Social Worker).

Employers also believe that universities should find ways to encourage, or even require, student involvement in volunteer activities to help them gain more practical experience in social work.

Students should be required to engage in more specialized practice or volunteer activities in order to have enough experience at the time of employment. (interview 3)

In other cases, a more rigorous selection process for students was suggested to ensure a better match between candidates' personalities and the field of study, thereby minimizing dropout from the profession.

Some employers appreciate the contribution of universities to the training of social workers and the responsible behavior of graduates during internships.

I don't know exactly, but universities must be doing something right, because the students who come for internships are conscientious. The problem is that after a while, this conscientiousness and motivation disappear. (interview 8)

However, they noted that this motivation is not always long-lasting. According to some of the analyzed data, it is believed that universities should not be directly involved in the employment of graduates, but rather focus on their personal and professional development, which will in turn facilitate their integration into the field.

Emerging Theory and Strategic Dimensions of University Support

From the secondary data analysis, during the selective coding phase, a central category emerged: Challenges of professional integration in a multicultural and multilingual context.

This category provides a complex overview of the situation of social work graduates, highlighting both positive experiences and perceptions, as well as areas for improvement to better support their professional integration. The analyzed data also offer concrete suggestions and actions, outlining the university's role in addressing the challenges faced by graduates in multilingual and multicultural environments.

The professional integration of Hungarian-speaking graduates is influenced by their level of language proficiency, particularly in Romanian and in specialized terminology. These competencies are increasingly important in public institutions and administrative tasks, which require formal knowledge of Romanian. In certain cases, where the clients of social services belong to ethnic minorities, these graduates have the advantage of being able to communicate and collaborate in their native language. Nevertheless, acquiring relevant language skills can offer a competitive edge in the selection process and career development.

Theoretical and practical training is generally considered suitable for professional integration, especially when evaluated in relation to knowledge directly connected to social work sectors. However, greater emphasis should be placed on acquiring legal knowledge and enhancing practical training to better meet labor market demands.

Graduates' personal traits, as well as certain competencies and skills, such as motivation, dedication, teamwork, and creativity, are important factors in professional integration and career development.

The experience accumulated by graduates is relevant both in recruitment and selection processes and in daily professional activities. This experience can be enhanced through collaboration and joint participation in professional events and volunteer activities. These opportunities benefit all stakeholders: graduates, universities, and specialized institutions.

University training should focus on the personal development of future social workers and ensure that theoretical and practical knowledge is aligned with the specific requirements of daily professional activities.

The emergent theory resulting from the secondary analysis suggests that the professional integration of Hungarian-speaking social work graduates in a multilingual and multicultural context is influenced by various structural, linguistic, and institutional factors. In this regard, the training university plays an active role in supporting graduates' integration.

Structural factors can influence the professional integration of Hungarian-speaking graduates. Aspects such as distribution of employment opportunities in case of employments where Hungarian language skills are valued or needed, or the recruitment procedures in public institutions, where the proper knowledge of the legislation is needed, being the exclusive recruitment procedure, or where the Romanian is the exclusive administration language can present a structural barrier regardless of the graduate`s actual professional competence.

The analyzed data indicate that language skills, particularly proficiency in Romanian language, and in specialized professional terminology, are crucial for the professional integration of the Hungarian speaking graduates. In some cases, the graduates reported experiencing prejudice related their Romanian language competence, often linked to assumption based on the language of their university studies. However, these prejudices tend to diminish once graduates demonstrate adequate communication skills. Even so, there can be situations when a more advanced level of proficiency may still be required.

Institutional factors play an important role in the integration process. These include the sociolinguistic sensitivity of employers, the expectation that graduates be affiliated with a professional organization such as the National College of Social Workers (CNASR), and the degree to which the university facilitates the transition between training and employment.

The university plays an active role in supporting professional integration through curricular content, practical training placements, and partnerships with employers and social institutions. An equally important aspect is the university's ability to monitor the career paths of its graduates and to prepare them for engagement with professional institutions. This includes encouraging

participation in CNASR, which is not only a professionally beneficial but often a prerequisite for securing employment in the field.

The conclusions drawn from the secondary data analysis are based exclusively on information collected from graduates of Partium Christian University and from employers in specialized institutions who have worked with graduates from this institution. Some recommendations may be relevant to other institutions offering training in minority languages, but the results cannot be generalized to all universities in Romania.

Therefore, the university's role can be outlined through four strategic dimensions that support the professional integration of social work graduates trained in a minority language:

1. Development of language and communication competencies

Communication and proficiency in Romanian are key factors in professional integration, especially in public institutions. Language skills contribute to professional success but are not the only important factor. The university can play an active role in developing specialized communication and language competencies, particularly in professional terminology, thereby supporting the integration of minority-language graduates into multilingual and multicultural environments.

2. Balancing theoretical and practical training with labor market demands

Theoretical and practical training can effectively support professional integration if aligned with labor market requirements. This includes developing practical skills, understanding documentation and administrative tasks, and acquiring legal knowledge specific to social work. The university curriculum can be diversified to ensure these practical competencies are addressed.

3. Collaboration between the university and specialized institutions

Graduates' professional integration largely depends on their practical experience. Through active involvement in collaborations and joint activities with specialized institutions, the training university can help graduates become more familiar with professional tasks and responsibilities. These activities serve as a bridge between academic training and the professional environment.

4. Providing practical training and developing competencies for multicultural environments

The effectiveness of practical training increases when students are involved in multicultural and multilingual settings, where they can develop the necessary competencies to work in such environments. For graduates trained in a minority language, developing these skills contributes to professional integration, identity preservation, and long-term retention in the field.

Discussion

According to the results obtained from the secondary data analysis, language competencies were considered important by both graduates and employers, as they influence professional activities, collaboration, and work experience.

The data highlighted the importance of proficiency in Romanian, specialized terminology, and foreign languages. Foreign language skills are particularly relevant in private institutions due to the need for international collaboration and securing funding for social services.

Romanian language proficiency is essential, as it is the official working language in most professional institutions. Moreover, the ability to apply legislation and use specialized documentation requires strong language skills in Romanian.

In public institutions, candidate selection is based almost exclusively on legal knowledge. Therefore, both general and specialized Romanian language proficiency are indispensable.

Although Hungarian language skills cannot be used as a formal selection criterion, they become highly relevant when professionals interact with clients belonging to the Hungarian minority. This was especially emphasized by private institutions, which noted that in such cases, graduates trained in Hungarian may have advantages in client-related professional interactions.

These professionals are able to communicate effectively with clients in their native language, which is a decisive factor in this field—consistent with the conclusions of Reith-Hall & Montgomery (2023).

The findings also highlight the need to increase practical training, expand the number of internship hours, and diversify practice opportunities. Similar conclusions have been drawn by other authors as well (Lazăr et al., 2020).

This is a relevant aspect for rethinking and adapting training programs to labor market demands and the actual responsibilities of professionals (Voicu et al., 2010).

While respondents acknowledged the usefulness of the theoretical knowledge gained during university studies, they also emphasized the need for more in-depth legal training and competence development tailored to the needs of social work. A lack of adequate legal knowledge may present a barrier to successful professional integration.

According to the results, key soft skills such as dedication, empathy, willingness to work, motivation, teamwork, critical thinking, and decision-making are essential in this field.

One major challenge in professional integration is the lack of experience, which was sometimes considered more important than theoretical preparation. Therefore, respondents recommended that students participate in as many volunteer activities as possible in order to acquire the practical skills expected by employers.

The data also pointed to work overload among social workers, an issue also mentioned by other researchers (Csesznek & Şimon, 2019). The absence of effective stress management strategies may lead to burnout, reduce motivation, and increase the risk of professionals leaving the field.

Both the findings and the literature underscore the importance of continuous training and professional supervision, which are essential in this domain (Lazăr et al., 2020).

Respondents suggested that aligning professional education with labor market needs, fostering social capital, improving collaboration between training institutions and field agencies, and strengthening the role of the National College of Social Workers in Romania could all support better professional integration.

They also emphasized the importance of personal development, arguing that while universities cannot teach everything, they can provide the foundation for building the essential skills required in the field.

Strategies proposed for supporting the integration of Hungarian-speaking social work graduates include strengthening language and communication competencies; balancing theoretical and practical training with market needs; enhancing university-field collaboration; and offering practice-based training focused on developing the necessary skills in a multicultural environment.

Although this secondary data analysis focused solely on graduates from Partium Christian University, the findings may serve as a useful model for other higher education institutions offering minority-language education.

The secondary analysis followed the ethical principles of the original research, with all data anonymized and used solely for research purposes. The main limitation is that data were not collected specifically for the current objectives, which may restrict the depth of analysis in certain aspects related to the university's role.

To further develop this research, future studies could focus on the perspectives of current students and teaching staff, or on longitudinal tracking of minority-language-trained graduates. Comparative studies

involving other minority-language programs could also provide valuable insights into institutional practices that support professional integration.

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