



THEORETICAL ASPECTS OF UNEMPLOYMENT

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to present a survey of theoretical aspects of unemployment. Many studies published in the literature proved economic, social and individual negative consequences that unemployment and under-employment generate in both developing countries and developed countries. Recent scientific studies highlight the existence of a significant link between unemployment and complex social issues. The motivation behind the decision to choose this research topic was to deeply understand the particularities of under-employment and unemployment, to estimate the effect of factors influencing these phenomena and to identify vulnerable groups, individuals difficult to integrate into the labor market.

Index Terms – negative effect, underemployment, vulnerable groups

I. GENERAL ASPECTS OF UNEMPLOYMENT

Unemployment is considered to be an imbalance between demand and supply of labor, a complex phenomenon that influences through its consequences all the economic, social and political structures of a society. Although the phenomenon of unemployment has been present throughout the centuries in the economies of the world's states, its definition is a controversial issue.

Defined in terms of the labor market, unemployment is the surplus of the labor supply over demand (Constantinescu, 2015, p. 129). Thus, unemployed are individuals who are able to work and who do not find a paid job. Usually, in the literature, unemployed are considered individuals who are actively looking for a job and who have registered employment applications at the employment offices, applications that could not be fulfilled due to the lack of jobs. Therefore, in this approach, unemployment appears as the exclusive result of the labor demand, leaving away the other dimension of the labor market, namely the labor force. The unemployed status derives from the choices made by the individual, decisions related to the professional training and decisions not to accept the offered employment opportunities, which do not



correspond to their own aspirations. Therefore, the absolute level of unemployment is function of both demand and supply of labor.

Today, in the literature, unemployment is generally considered to be a negative state of a part of the available active population, which cannot find a job due to quantitative, structural and qualitative inconsistencies between labor demand and supply of labor.

According to Dobrotă (1997, p. 402), regardless of the angle of approach, unemployment is a labor market dysfunction, an imbalance between global labor demand and supply. Global labor demand is the need for a labor force, formed at a certain point in time, in a real economy. Global demand for labor is determined by the sum of decisions taken by economic actors of the labor market. Depending on the level of manifestation, we can discriminate between two different types of labor demand: microeconomic level and macroeconomic level. At the microeconomic level, we can talk about a labor demand of the firms. This type of demand is based on the price of the goods being manufactured, the marginal revenue and the marginal cost of production. At the macroeconomic level, labor demand is the results of the aggregation of labor demand curves of firms, in each branch of economic activity.

The demand of work is nonlinear, with a high degree of sensitivity to economic changes. By contrast, the labor supply is inelastic. Its volume, dynamics and its structure is function of demographic and economic factors.

From the employment point of view, demand and supply of labor may fall into one of the following situations:

- a) global labor demand is equal to the global labor supply, where we have a balance in the labor market and full employment;
- b) global labor demand is higher than supply, generating a labor shortage that can be offset either by additional labor resources, or by increasing labor productivity;
- c) global labor demand is higher than supply, generating a labor shortage that can be offset either by additional labor resources or by increasing labor productivity;
- d) global demand is lower than supply, and implicitly part of the labor force will remain without paid employment.

As a result, the labor market may be at a time either in full-time employment or in a state of imbalance (either over-occupation or under-occupation).

According to Coșea (2011, p. 217), three major theories addressing the mechanism of balancing demand and global supply of labor are formulated in the economic literature:

a) *human capital theory*. In the view of economists specializing in the study of the labor market, human capital is perceived as a set of abilities, skills and knowledge that increase the productivity of workers' work. Voicu (2004, pp. 1-2) emphasizes that human capital is composed of educational capital, encompassing the skills and knowledge acquired by individuals through school education and biological capital, which sum up the physical abilities of individuals. The job offer seeks to capitalize all these abilities and to gain back the investment in education, by earning salaries in accordance with acquired skills and own aspirations. However, Coșea (2011, p. 217) point out that, given the increase of the educational level and the over-specialization of individuals, there may be an over-dimensioned supply of labor, which leads to unwanted acceptance of a wage below the cost of education. Human capital theory highlights that the individuals' vulnerability to become actors of the unfortunate experience of



unemployment is amplified by the overall development of society and implicitly the development of human capital;

b) *job search theory* has become very popular in the '70 as an alternative to standard labor supply theory (Faggian, 2014, p. 60). The central idea of this theory is that the individual is rational, and he can give up on his own initiative a paid job to seek and get another paid work closer to his own desires and aspirations; the process of finding a new job is a dynamic one, the individual being the one who decides when to stop it, under certain particular conditions of time and space. According to Coșea (2011, p. 217), an individual can choose to be unemployed until he / she finds a job according to his or her own wishes and aspirations, which is why the unemployed and unoccupied individuals can simultaneously be present on the labor market;

c) *labor market segmentation theory* highlights the existence of particular job offer categories on the labor market, such as women, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and other vulnerable social groups. According to this approach, the labor market is composed of a segment of the primary market, which contains well-paid, stable and high-income jobs, and a segment of the secondary market, composed of low-paid jobs, with a high degree of instability, lack of promotion potential and no developmental opportunities in terms of social status;

d) *wage theory*, as a tool for increasing the efficiency and productivity of work, starts from the premise that there is a direct, positive association between wage and labor productivity. A high level of salary increases the motivation and attachment of the individual to the paid work place, leading to an increase in the productivity of the individual and his/her efficiency.

We conclude this presentation of the different definitions and approaches of unemployment with a corollary formulated by Coșea (2011, p. 218): "*regardless of how the law of labor supply and demand can be explained or detailed, unemployment is its main consequence, with important effects on maintaining the macroeconomic equilibrium*".

II. CAUSES AND FORMS OF UNEMPLOYMENT

Unemployment is a complex phenomenon, with a specific profile determined by the peculiarities of economy within which it manifests itself. That is why we will present in this section the main causes of unemployment, in close connection with its typology, in an obvious correlation.

A first cause, intensively debated in the literature, is *the demographic increase of the population*. As the global population grows, it is increasingly difficult to find solutions for its full employment. This imbalance leads to an increase in the number of individuals left without a paid job. Young generation is particularly affected, with the additional labor demands of the new generation not being met by jobseekers. This is accompanied by the discrepancies between the theoretical education of young people entering the labor market and the needs and exigencies imposed by the economic and social activity, as well as the inclination of the employers to offer jobs to the previously experienced individuals on the labor market, already trained and acquired labor discipline.

A second cause of unemployment is the accelerated technological progress at the global level. New and advanced technologies replace the low-skilled or unskilled workers with maximum efficiency; production is faster and more accurate in these conditions, but the number of unemployed individuals is obviously increased by the use of these advanced technologies.



A *third cause* of unemployment is represented by the unfavorable evolution of economic activities that generate the loss of employment by parts of the employed population. This adds to the lack of education or skills required by employers. If educational training does not comply with labor market requirements, inconsistencies may arise, leading to the emergence of structural unemployment. As the need for educated and qualified workforce will increase, employment opportunities for individuals with a low educational level will decrease.

Also, unemployment can be a consequence of rising overall employers' production costs. Increasing production costs can make it difficult to pay a satisfactory level of wage for the workforce, causing a part of individuals to leave their current job, in the desire to find a better paid employee. In some particular situations, employers need to reduce their company budget due to an unfavorable economic situation (e.g. the economic crisis, industrial decline or organizational restructuring), choosing to reduce the number of employees and dissolve jobs, which automatically determines increase in unemployment. Dobrotă (1997, p. 407) points out that unemployment may arise as a consequence of the demand for jobs from mature individuals who have either been unemployed until that time or have had work disruptions for a long period.

We will present the most common types of unemployment and their characteristics. Thus, economic literature describes the following particular forms of unemployment:

e) Cyclical unemployment is the unemployment that occurs when the level of production is below the level of full employment. This type of unemployment is dependent on cyclical fluctuations in the economy. Economic theory and economic practice show that even in the case of the full employment, there is still natural unemployment and, implicitly, a natural rate of unemployment, defined as non-cyclical unemployment. If N is the number of the working population, N^* the level of full employment and N_1 the current employment level, we will have $N - N^* = S_{nc}$, where S_{nc} is the non-cyclical unemployment rate, and the $N - N_1 = S_c$, where S_c represents the level of cyclical unemployment and $S_c > S_{nc}$. Cyclical unemployment is called "keynesian unemployment" in the literature, following the name of the person who identified and analyzed it;

f) Structural unemployment is determined by the presence of an imbalance between occupational-professional, territorial, demographic structures of supply and demand for labor. Structural unemployment is closely related to the major phases of the restructuring of an economy. According to Țigănescu and Roman (2005, p. 253), this particular form of unemployment would be eliminated by labor market adjustments, if wages would be fully flexible and costs of geographical and occupational mobility would be reduced. Structural unemployment is the result of a widening of division of labor, of specialization of economic activity, as well as of the restructuring of the market. Both structural and structural changes can occur in the national economy as well as at the regional level. As a consequence, there are differences between the specializations demanded by the employers and those that the jobseekers possess. The size of structural unemployment is a function of the speed at which changes in demand and supply of services and goods in an economy are manifested. According to Băcescu and Băcescu-Cărbunaru (1998, p. 729), structural unemployment is incompatible with the notion of full employment;



g) Frictional unemployment is the most common form of this phenomenon, which can even occur under conditions of full employment. Even in an equilibrium labor market or in the full employment situation there will always be unemployed people between two jobs and who are the expression of this frictional unemployment (Țigănescu și Roman, 2005, p. 253). Frictional unemployment is a consequence of the dynamism of the labor market. The difference between frictional unemployment and other types of unemployment is given precisely by the fact that the length of time to search for a new job, according to one's own aspirations, is relatively short, and for those individuals between two jobs there are available jobs. The dimension of frictional unemployment is determined by the flows on the labor market and the speed at which unemployed individuals find a paid job. Increasing the amount of unemployment benefit is considered in the literature as an element that increases the time needed for individuals to find a new paid job;

h) Seasonal unemployment is similar to cyclical unemployment, being determined by fluctuations in labor demand. The distinction is that this type of unemployment can be anticipated, labor demand fluctuations following a predictable trend over the course of a year. At the end of a working season, many individuals are looking for a new job, thus going through a seasonal season of unemployment. Seasonal fluctuations lead to temporary increases in the unemployment rate of some categories of individuals (for example, the unemployment rate in agriculture increases in the winter, or the youth unemployment rate increases during the summer period, etc.);

i) partial unemployment is generated by the temporary reduction of activity or working time;

j) Technical unemployment is a consequence of the partial or total interruption of the activity from external causes of the enterprise (lack of raw material, lack of necessary equipment, etc.).

We have to underline that, in the contemporary economies, we do not encounter these types of unemployment in pure form, but the different forms of unemployment coexist and interpenetrate each other. The knowledge of the causes of unemployment and the particularities of the different forms it carries is of great importance for the analysis of the trends of this phenomenon, its subsequent dynamics, as well as for the elaboration of the methods of combating unemployment and improving the employment of the affected individuals.

III. METHODS OF MEASURING UNEMPLOYMENT

Quantification of unemployment is carried out using specific statistical indicators describing its absolute and relative level, as well as its duration and structure.

The level of unemployment is a statistical indicator showing the percentage of individuals who do not have a job in the total number of individuals wishing to work. In Romania, the unemployment level is calculated either on the basis of the labor force balance or using the data provided by the household labor force surveys.

The mass of unemployment is the sum of all people who, at some point in time, qualify for inclusion in the "unemployed" category. The mass of unemployment is represented by the active population available.



Unemployment rate is the most common indicator used to assess this phenomenon, calculated as a percentage ratio between the mass of unemployment and one of its reference parameters, such as the active population, the civilian active population or the employed population. In Romania, we have two ways of calculating the unemployment rate, the ILO unemployment rate, calculated as the ratio between the number of ILO unemployed and the active population, and the registered unemployment rate, calculated as the ratio of the number of unemployed registered by the county offices for employment and the civilian active population, calculated according to the balance of the labor force methodology.

The duration of unemployment is the period from the time of the loss of the job to the time of finding a new paid job. There are situations when the individual ends his/her unemployment by going into inactivity, thus implicitly leaving the workforce. Between unemployment and the unemployment rate there is an obvious association, a shorter duration of unemployment influencing unemployment and unemployment flows and therefore the unemployment rate. The dynamics of the labor market makes the flows of unemployment and unemployment outflows high. Analyzing the unemployment studies published so far, we can conclude that, in general, a high proportion of unemployment is short and medium, covering a range of one to 60 days. Exceptions are of course the countries in transition from one form of economy to another, where unemployment can exceed 6 months or even a year, because the change in the economic system requires time and extensive processes of economic reorganization and reconstruction, with direct effect on employment and occupation. There are situations where an individual may go through several periods of unemployment, even within one year, and this existence of multiple durations needs to be carefully analyzed when the average duration of unemployment is quantified over a given period.

There are a number of factors that influence the duration of unemployment, such as the age of the individual affected by unemployment, his/her gender, educational level, specialization, the environment from which he/she comes, previous work experience, health, whether or not receiving unemployment benefits etc. The effect of each of these factors on the duration of unemployment has its own valences and needs to be investigated. In the literature we find numerous studies demonstrating a significant effect of gender, education, age on the duration of unemployment. A series of recent studies demonstrate a clear association between unemployment and unemployment benefits. Due to the particularities of each job, an unemployed person prefers to wait until a job is found to be satisfactory. If an individual does not receive unemployment benefit, expectation is considered to be costly and unproductive and individual is prone to accept the earliest jobs offered. However, if the unemployed individual receives a consistent unemployment allowance, then he can afford to prolong the length of his unemployment until he finds the job he desires. Job search theory, broadly described in the previous section, points out that individuals are inclined to remain in a longer period of unemployment if they are paid for (Mortensen, 1977).

Thus, granting of the unemployment allowance becomes a factor contributing to its duration. Atkinson and Micklewright (1991) analyze the effect of unemployment benefits on unemployment rates for the OECD countries and show that unemployment benefits have a significant but temporary effect on the output rate of unemployment of individuals, the effect coming from labor demand rather than from labor supply. In a study on the effect of granting



unemployment benefits on its duration on the labor market in Finland, Kettunen (1993) points out that granting unemployment benefits has a negative impact on the probability of re-employment for the first 5 months, for the analyzed subjects. A direct, positive association between unemployment benefits and its duration is evidenced by Moffitt (1985) and Ham and Rea (1987) for the labor market in the US. In a study published in 2002, Lalive shows that on the labor market in Switzerland, consistent unemployment benefits does not greatly affect the length of unemployment of individuals and the duration of seeking a new job. Changes in the amount of unemployment benefits do not influence the quality of the individual's post-employment activity, but lead to a reduction in the time between two jobs and influence the time until the individual is included in another social insurance scheme. The discovery of "sensitive points" on the duration of unemployment and the probability of finding a new job are of great importance for understanding the correlations between the macroeconomic variables involved and for enhancing the labor market capacity to absorb skilled labor.

The distribution of unemployment involves the analysis of the incidence of unemployment by categories of individuals, depending on their socio-economic peculiarities. Age is a variable with a strong effect on the distribution of unemployment. Thus, the unemployment of the young population is significantly higher than the unemployment of the other age groups. In Romania the overall unemployment rate is below the EU28 average, but the unemployment rate of the population aged 15-29 is above the EU28 average, at the same age group. Behavior of the young population is different on the labor market compared to the behavior of the adult population, and therefore the causes, incidence and duration of unemployment are different for these two categories of workforce. In the age group over 45, the main cause of unemployment is the loss of work. In contrast, for the young population, the main cause of unemployment is either entering the labor market for the first time or returning to the labor market after a longer period than the law requires to be kept in national unemployment records.

The unemployment duration also has its own characteristics, depending on the age variable; if the number of the unemployed is lower for the age group of 45 and the unemployment rate is higher, the age group 15-29 is the opposite, the number of the unemployed is higher, but their unemployment is shorter. The higher the age, the longer the unemployment rate, the positive and the direct relationship between the two variables. Unemployment periods of the young population are usually completed by hiring or re-employing, while the population over 45 years is completed due to the expiration of the legal period of receiving the unemployment benefit or by inactivity (most of the time, the withdrawal from the workforce).

Also, the incidence and duration of unemployment is different depending on the level of education of individuals. The population with a low educational level has a higher incidence of unemployment and a high duration of unemployment. The population with higher education has a lower incidence of unemployment, and a shorter duration of unemployment. The population with a low educational level is more inclined to be in long-term unemployment, compared to groups with a high level of education.

Sensitive differences between the unemployment rate, the duration of unemployment and the exit from unemployment are also found between men and women, between rural and urban individuals, as well as between individuals with normal health and those with disabilities. That is why in the future we will focus on the effect of the factors that influence the duration of



unemployment, the destinations of unemployment and the probability of re-employment, but strictly for the Romanian higher education population.

The frequency of unemployment is a useful indicator to analyze how many times, on average, an individual is experiencing unemployment episodes in a certain period of time. According to Băcescu and Băcescu-Cărbunaru (1998, p. 739), the faster the rhythm of the labor force increase, the higher the natural rate of unemployment. Also, the frequency of unemployment depends on the characteristics of the labor demand of the economic agents. The higher the demand for labor force between the economic agents, the higher the natural rate of unemployment is. Băcescu and Băcescu-Cărbunaru (1998, p. 739) emphasizes that the natural rate of unemployment is a function of time, and its estimation is a complex process due to the multitude of factors with which it interacts.

IV. MEASURES AGAINST UNEMPLOYMENT AND TO IMPROVE THE USE OF LABOR FORCE

Reducing unemployment and improving the employment of labor resources is a desideratum of any society. Unemployment, however, is a phenomenon of high complexity, and sometimes short-term measures to reduce it have generated serious long-term imbalances, despite the fact that these measures have temporarily resolved pressing social problems in terms of unemployment and its dynamics.

One of the main causes of unemployment, and especially the cyclic one, is insufficient economic growth. Thus, an important measure of improving unemployment is stimulating growth. It is the state that has the main role, through its monetary and fiscal mechanisms. Through investments we can have economic growth, progress, and implicitly new jobs created. It is also possible to work towards an efficient allocation of the total work fund, opting for the reduction of the working week, the reduction of the retirement age, the extension of the compulsory schooling period, the flexibility of the work program etc. Effective education, early professional orientation, retraining and reconversion are essential elements of a long-term strategy to improve unemployment. Another group of measures aims at increasing the mobility of active labor force. However, the success of these measures depends on the efficiency of the educational process, the professional orientation of young people towards the most demanding areas of the labor market, legislative measures to encourage interregional migration, rural-urban migration and the insertion of young graduates into the labor market.

As the literature highlights, unemployment is a resounding failure of the market. Thus, Dobrotă (1997, p. 414) states that all measures to combat unemployment imply serious investments and must overcome numerous economic, social and cultural difficulties for their realization.

In the short term, to mitigate its negative effects, the primary objective is to ensure minimum income, at least temporarily, for individuals affected by unemployment through the unemployment allowance. The amount of the unemployment allowance and the length of time for which it is granted vary from one state to another, depending on the legislative particularities governing the labor market. According to Constantinescu (2015, p. 137), the unemployment allowance implies that the amounts offered provide both a minimum



subsistence level for the affected individuals, as well as assistance for the unemployed in order to support the participation in the qualification, re-qualification and retraining programs necessary for the re-employment. Each country has its own unemployment benefit system and a set of requirements for receiving it. As a general rule, all countries face difficulties stemming from the limitation of financial resources and the pressure and dissatisfaction of those who, through the payment of taxes and fees, contribute to the formation of the necessary funds.

For a medium to long-term horizon, a major objective of macroeconomic policies must be to reduce and re-integrate unemployed into the labor market. Thus, the necessary measures aimed at achieving these objectives can be grouped into measures that directly concern the unemployed and measures concerning the employed population. Measures that directly concern unemployed people imply a series of actions and decisions for the training, qualification and retraining of those who are looking for a new job. Besides the actions implemented for human capital development, we can also state the actions implemented by the state to stimulate private initiative, entrepreneurship and atypical forms of employment. Measures aimed at the active working population have the main objective to reduce unemployment, by reorganizing the labor division and production. Governments protect the occupied population through actions aimed at removing immigrants and repatriating them to their native countries. But, as Constantinescu (2015, p. 137) points out, the best solution for diminishing unemployment is to create new jobs. And this can only be achieved through economic growth and progress.

In our view, the reduction of unemployment can be achieved by modifying social protection policies, by paying increased attention to active measures to support the affected individuals for a quick return to the labor market and to avoid encouraging demotivation of unemployed, by granting too much unemployment benefits. As a corollary of those presented in this section, we underline that, in the literature, policies to combat unemployment and improve employment are divided into two major classes: active policies and passive policies. Experience has shown that active policies have the most effective reintegration into the labor force of individuals affected by unemployment. Under this active policy palette, we find all the efforts of the state to stimulate the employability of young graduates and vulnerable groups by providing employers with subsidies, offering viable training programs, guidance, qualification, retraining, reconversion, labor market flexibility, promotion an active search for a new job, the direct creation of new jobs. Passive policies have at their core the granting of unemployment benefits as a temporary insurance measure for the individual with minimal financial subsistence.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this paper was to present a survey of scientific knowledge in the field of unemployment. A series of studies published in the literature show economic, social and individual negative consequences that unemployment and sub-occupation generate in both developing countries and developed countries. Recent scientific studies highlight the existence of a significant link between unemployment, sub-occupation and complex social issues. The motivation behind the decision to choose this research topic was to deeply understand the particularities of sub-occupation and unemployment, to estimate the effect of factors influencing



these phenomena and to identify vulnerable groups, individuals difficult to integrate into the labor market.

We focused on the general assumptions about unemployment, the causes and the forms of unemployment, the ways of measuring unemployment and the difficulties generated by the quantification of this phenomenon. Sub-employment and unemployment lead to increased social tensions, deteriorating households' quality of life and, implicitly, serious economic difficulties. The budget revenues of a country are seriously affected by these negative phenomena. As the published studies highlight, the consequences of unemployment do not stop after resumption of work by the affected people. There is a direct link between the duration of unemployment and the post-unemployment salaries of the affected persons, as long the unemployment is higher, the more the post-unemployment wages are more affected. There is also a direct association between unemployment and crime-related manifestations in a society. At the individual level, sub-occupation and unemployment determine the loss of self-confidence, optimism, skills and knowledge assimilated to that moment by the affected person. The health of individuals affected by unemployment, especially mental health, deteriorates as a result of this unfortunate experience. At the end of the paper we presented the main strategies to combat unemployment and improve employment.

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