

Editorial

This first issue of the *SEER Journal for Labour and Social Affairs in Eastern Europe* for 2026 focuses on the ‘Green and digital transitions in south-east Europe’. Its thematic section is devoted to relevant social and labour aspects of the green and digital transitions and to how policymakers and stakeholders in the region are dealing with them.

The article by Nataša Kovačević provides a comprehensive review of the just transition framework in Montenegro. It draws on several examples from transition communities in the western Balkans and provides a case study of Pljevlja, where there is a coal-fired power plant built to take advantage of the local fossil fuel infrastructure. The article seeks to support the perspective of a democratic, inclusive and regionally coordinated approach to the energy transition, identifying the opportunities which a just transition might provide to secure economic diversification and, while doing so, to improve local opportunities in an equitable way. The author draws lessons from successful transitions in the western Balkans and concludes with a series of recommendations embedding just transition as a viable, progressive policy tool.

Dimitar Nikoloski, Branimir Jovanovic, Marija Midovska Petkoska and Dijana Jovanoska assess the specific sectoral and cross-sectoral green skills mismatch, drawing evidence from North Macedonia. With the shift toward a greener economy, it is necessary to develop new skills and update existing ones. Based on an empirical analysis carried out on a representative sample of 530 companies in North Macedonia in 2025, the authors demonstrate how substantial green skills imbalances are affecting both sector-specific and cross-sectoral competencies. Certain industries exhibit particularly high imbalances, reflecting the uneven pace of the transition and underscoring the need for targeted policy responses. The results point to a systemic misalignment between the country’s education and training system and the evolving needs of a green economy. The authors propose a set of policy recommendations for reforms to the system including as regards the insufficient integration of green content into vocational courses.

Qerim Qerimi and Bruno S. Sergi reframe the future of the western Balkans within the European Union through the perspective of the contribution that might be made by the digital and green transitions. The article notes that the EU’s enlargement toward the south-east of Europe has been mostly captured through a prism of risk, potential instability and institutional fragility. The authors argue for a conceptual and strategic shift: the western Balkans should be repositioned not as a policy burden but as a contributor to Europe’s competitiveness and resilience. They identify the comparative advantages in digital services, particularly in AI-related capacities, and in renewable energy potential, arguing that the region can align itself with the EU’s twin green and energy transitions. They add, however, that this requires political stability and strengthened institutional capacity alongside an improved absorption of EU research and development funds and regional strategies that are better coordinated.

Based on an empirical survey, the article by Cvetan Kovač and Ivana Krišto analyses the state of and trends in platform work in Croatia during 2025. They use official data from the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy, encompassing quantitative indicators on 21,704 workers, four key digital platforms and the operations of 2,336 market intermediaries (aggregators). By implementing amendments to the Labour Act, Croatia has established an advanced regulatory model that precedes the 2024 EU Directive on improving working conditions in platform work, positioning itself as a leader in the digital transformation of the labour market. The central subject of the authors' research was the effectiveness of the Unified Electronic Labour Record (JEER) system both in ensuring transparency and real-time data monitoring and in combating undeclared work. The results highlight the significant role of technological solutions in protecting workers' rights and stabilising relations within the tripartite (platform-aggregator-worker) platform work model.

The article by Julejda Aliaj and Enkelejda Haxhiraj looks at workers' rights in the digital transition with a focus on Albania. The authors argue that, with rapid technological development, the digital transition has created new opportunities but it has also introduced considerable challenges regarding the protection of workers' rights and the provision of fair and equal working conditions. One of the most pressing issues is job insecurity, particularly for workers involved in the platform economy who often lack full rights. Furthermore, the use of digital technologies to monitor worker performance is raising serious concerns about privacy and the protection of personal data, while another major challenge is the displacement of certain jobs due to automation. The authors identify gaps in the legislative framework in Albania, emphasising the absence of an explicit, statutory recognition of the right to disconnect that further aggravates the vulnerability of remote workers. In a culture in which employees are facing intense pressures to remain constantly available, as a result of the spread and adoption of digital communication channels, the lack of clear legal boundaries is threatening the traditional structure and meaning of rest periods. They conclude that, without legal adjustments and a modernisation of trade unions to operate within the decentralised digital space, the balance of power will continue to favour employers, hindering the achievement of a fair and just digital transition.

Finally, Fabian Teichmann examines the case of cyber resilience in the western Balkans in the context of its critical infrastructure, the EU accession process and the social dimension of digital security. He points out that cyber insecurity has become a matter not only of national security but of social welfare, public service continuity and democratic trust. While the western Balkans are digitising at speed, the region is lagging behind in terms of cybersecurity governance, institutional capacity and the presence of a skilled workforce. The article therefore argues that cyber resilience should be treated as a core component of the region's European integration and of its social model, rather than as a narrow technical or law enforcement concern. Drawing on the EU's evolving cybersecurity acquis – notably the NIS2 Directive and the Cyber Resilience Act – as well as on the region's acknowledged weaknesses in the rule of law and anti-corruption enforcement, the article identifies four interlocking challenges: exposed critical infrastructure; regulatory misalignment; a governance

and corruption deficit; and an acute cybersecurity skills gap. It concludes with a calibrated agenda for regional cooperation, accession-driven harmonisation, workforce development and the involvement of the social partners with the aim of making digital resilience a shared public good.

The open section of this issue carries two contributions that fit into the core interest of the *SEER Journal*: trade unions and labour rights; and the continuing relevance and importance of models of workplace democracy.

In their article, Sanja Paunović, Spomenka Paunović and Rajko Kosanović provide a comparative analysis of the state of labour rights in the western Balkans with perspectives for trade union action. They examine labour market transformation in the region, examining how economic and demographic developments are affecting the realisation of labour dignity, drawing on successive iterations of the ITUC Global Rights Index. The article combines a review of international labour standards with a comparative analysis of labour market developments, migration trends, trade union rights and institutional responses, paying particular attention to demographic decline, outwards labour migration, growing labour shortages, an increasing reliance on migrant workers and the expansion of non-standard forms of employment. For sustainable labour market development, the authors make recommendations for policies that are required to address labour shortages and to strengthen labour rights, social protection and collective bargaining institutions.

Closing the open section and this issue of the *SEER Journal*, a review by Magnus Neubert introduces the book by Anna Calori (2026) on ‘Engineering global socialism: ownership, non-alignment, and corporate culture in a Bosnian company’, focusing in particular on a case study of Energoinvest. The review concludes by highlighting Calori’s recovery of alternative visions of global integration and her careful documentation of how those visions were betrayed, in the process offering essential resources for thinking about the more just and more democratic futures that a globalised world requires if the interests of working people are to prevail.

If you would like to add to the debate started by any articles you read in this issue, do let one of us know: we are always happy to consider for publication in these pages original articles that offer a fresh perspective on the continuing subjects of workers’ rights and democratic development that are well established here. We look forward to hearing from you!

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July 2026

