

Editorial

This first issue of the *SEER Journal for Labour and Social Affairs in Eastern Europe* for 2023 focuses on ‘Self-employed and mobile workers’ with articles drawn from empirical evidence developed following active research undertaken in Romania. Migration and labour mobility have always been a key interest for this journal; this issue lives up to this tradition.

Romania is the EU Member State with the highest share of mobile workers in its working age population; moreover, as a key country in south-east Europe, it also delivers important lessons for the entire region. Three articles from different angles deliver significant contributions to the subject: the first highlights the unique case of the vulnerable status of the self-employed in Romania; the second delivers empirical evidence on how precarity and job insecurity at home sets the pattern for the labour struggles of Romanian mobile workers abroad; and the third monitors social media use by Romanian-speaking mobile workers and migrants in Germany.

The article by Luana Miruna Pop provides a comprehensive analysis of the labour market structure and its development in Romania and documents the increasing differences in exposure to poverty and social exclusion between employees and the self-employed. The author finds that, contrary to other European countries, which face the problem of how better to protect workers in new forms of employment, Romania is still searching for a policy solution that will allow both for the existing self-employed to become ‘visible’ in the formal economy and for the diversification of types of employment. The article concludes that high in-work poverty in Romania requires a redefinition of the problem and an understanding of the roots of the widening gap between employees and the self-employed.

Christian Sperneac-Wolfer shows how the turbulent labour market transformation in Romania, with high job insecurity, shapes the patterns of the labour struggles of Romanian mobile workers on German construction sites. Drawing on fieldwork conducted amongst Romanian construction workers in Germany and in their home contexts in Romania over a two-year period, the article argues that, while the nature of the results of this transformation limits open labour resistance, it simultaneously leads to forms of hidden resistance as workers seek to fight back against their vulnerability to exploitation. This result can be traced to the intertwining of a work motive on the part of workers and local work characteristics.

The article by Mihaela-Violeta Vochin explores the structure and content of Romanian language Facebook groups in Germany based on an empirical survey of social media use by migrant communities. The results show that migrants acquire information on how to navigate better the challenges of the host society such as, for example, accessing the labour market, housing, health services and education. The author argues that digital social spaces ease the process of integration/inclusion and thus act as an encouragement to future migrants.

Lyuboslav Kostov reviews the most recent empirical literature on the issue of income and wealth inequalities around the world, with particular regard to inequality in Bulgaria. Accordingly, the country shows the most pronounced inequalities in the

EU with the Bulgarian tax system being one of the most regressive in the world. At the same time, the minimum wage in Bulgaria has fallen by one-tenth as a share of GDP, ranking the country in 88th place in terms of minimum wages.

In the open section of this issue, Emin Ahmet Kaplan, Zeynep Hoş and İlkey Güler evaluate the impact of social security spending in EU candidate countries, including Turkey, Serbia, North Macedonia and Albania, on economic growth in the 1996–2020 period. Based on empirical panel data analysis, the authors conclude that social security spending positively affects economic growth.

Finally, the article by Anisa Balla, Flora Merko, Ela Golemi and Marta Biancardi presents a framework within which the authors explore sustainable regional development in Albania using comparative analysis based on the human development index with a focus on the regions of ‘Durana’ and Kukës. It concludes that, despite the economic and social development of Albania in the last three decades, regional differentiation, and even extreme differentiation, have been registered at local level within the municipalities and the communes.

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