

Editorial

This second issue of the *SEER Journal for Labour and Social Affairs in Eastern Europe* for 2021 continues to focus on the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the region. As the title suggests, this main section of the issue was aiming to draw some lessons from the pandemic; the reality, at the time of publication, is that the region is facing a critical period with a fourth and most intense wave with yet unknown consequences.

Azemina Mashovic and Tatjana Dragičević Radičević examine the economic and social effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, examining labour market developments, minimum wages and government relief measures in western Balkans countries.

Building on the article published in *SEER* 2020-1, where Croatia was among the first EU member states to acknowledge Covid-19 as an occupational disease, the authors Ivana Krišto, Cvetan Kovač and Ana Šijaković show how Covid-19 became the most common occupational disease in healthcare and social welfare. The article maps the prevalence of occupational diseases in the country over the last decade by type of disease, region and profession. While asbestos-related illnesses used to be dominant a decade ago, by 2020 these represented only a small fraction of total occupational disease cases while other illnesses (most prominently Covid-19) have come to the fore. The number of cases per 100,000 employees in the health and social sector was ten times the average rate for the economy as a whole.

Fabian Teichmann and Marie-Christin Falker take up an issue that established democracies in the EU have also been facing: public procurement and corruption during Covid-19. In the western Balkans, however, crisis situations like the current pandemic pose a critical test case for governance. The authors draw back to the infamous corruption case in which a raspberry processing firm, Srebrena Malina, was able to import ventilators from China without any expertise in the issue and without the ventilators themselves being up to the task of treating Covid-19 patients. The authors have carried out an empirical study to map possible policy responses examining self-monitoring and whistleblowing incentives in the aftermath of the scandal.

Further articles in our open section reach back to prior topics that this journal has been dealing with in recent issues.

In an article drawing on his presentation to the *SEER Journal* workshop on the Dayton Agreement, held on 2 July 2021 with the support of the European Trade Union Institute,¹ Christophe Solioz discusses the consequences of the Dayton Agreement focusing on the issues of de-consolidation and de-democratisation which are inhibiting Bosnia and Herzegovina (among other western Balkan states) from becoming a credible EU accession candidate. The main message of this thoughtful article is that we should do away with a Eurocentric perspective, away with the outdated Westphalian model of 1648 and away with traditional geopolitics, instead opening up pathways to new, more organic and human regional concepts such as, for example, bioregions that also draw upon flood-risk characteristics.

1 For further information, see <https://www.etui.org/fr/node/33224>.

Meanwhile, Viktorija Mano examines the support potential of domestic elites for reforms in transition economies, using the example of North Macedonia to highlight the ways in which elites prove key to generating support for reforms even when these do not appear to be particularly favourable in, or sympathetic to, domestic circumstances.

Martin Hutsebaut provides a broad-based analysis of the informal economy in Moldova with lessons for the entire south-east Europe region. The article presents a structured compilation of the major findings of surveys, articles and reports into the realities of the informal economy in Moldova. Comparative lessons are drawn from actions taken to address aspects of the informal economy in other European countries, with particular attention paid to what has been done in the immediate region of south-east Europe.

Finally, Melanie Hien takes a look at the situation of civil society organisations in Hungary and discusses how this fateful example might affect the neighbouring south-east Europe region. While mapping civil society organisations in Hungary, their funding and the restrictive policies and legislative proposals of the government, the author also looks at the scope of and reasons for Orbán's involvement in Slovenia and Slovakia. The author concludes that the oppressive treatment of civil society groups critical to the government fosters the thesis of the efforts of Orbán and Fidesz to build long-lasting right-wing power structures across the region.

Calvin Allen
Béla Galgóczi

November 2021

Just before we went to press, we learned the devastating news of the death of our friend and colleague, Dr. Darko Marinkovic, on 14 December 2021. Darko was our good friend and colleague on the *SEER Journal* for 25 years and a founding member of the Editorial Board. Darko was a committed believer in trade union ideals and a collective approach to the workplace, both in his native Serbia and across the western Balkans, and a redoubtable fighter for trade union and workers' rights. Alongside the considerable energies he brought to the cause, Darko also had an irrepressible sense of humour and we'll miss him terribly.

We will be paying fuller tribute to Darko's life and career in the next edition of the *SEER Journal* but, for now, zhiveli, Darko; i hvala lepa.

Members of the editorial board