

Editorial

This first issue of the *SEER Journal for Labour and Social Affairs in Eastern Europe* for 2021 focuses on the *repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic* across the region, with a view also to the role of the EU. When the *SEER* devoted an issue to the pandemic a year ago, the region was comparatively less affected than western Europe. Now that it is fully in the grip of a health crisis instigated by the pandemic, this issue takes a closer look, covering mostly Serbia and North Macedonia from different perspectives and taking into account the economic and social security points of view. A further article explores the multinational fashion industry and the situation of workers in shopping malls during the pandemic based on a case study and survey of workers' opinions.

The second part of the issue reaches back to the focus topic of the last edition, 'The legacy of the Dayton peace agreement', presenting also views from Serbian perspectives as well as a unique account linked to a film project on the Siege of Sarajevo.

The article by Jens Becker and Ina Kulić focuses on the role of the EU in dealing with the health crisis in the western Balkans and on how views of this are changing in the region. The states of the western Balkans, which have been relying on an EU perspective for years and which have repeatedly been put off, have also been hit hard, piling problems on top of health services that are, for a number of reasons, already seriously jeopardised. In view of the worsening situation – countries in central and south-eastern Europe are over-represented among those with the highest numbers of Covid-19 related deaths – the authors take a closer look at current practicalities and political realities in the region's 'high incidence areas'.

Snežana Aleksić reviews the initial experiences of Covid-19 in Serbia in the context of other pandemics during the 20th century. The author reviews data on life expectancy, with a particular eye on air pollution, as well as the pandemic's initial impact on mortality and on key life events including marriage and divorce. The main focus of the article is on human life and work, as well as on the consequences for the economy. The author also presents the response of the government in terms of the declaration of the state of emergency as well as the measures set out to mitigate Covid-19's economic impact. She concludes that, after the pandemic has taken its toll, it will have left the country with additional credit indebtedness in the long-run.

A wide-ranging article by Miodrag Komarčević, Petar Čelik and Ivan Arnautović takes a theoretical look at the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic for the concept of the securitisation of a state. The authors discuss the concurrent presence of three social phenomena with global effects: digitalisation and business automation; the securitisation of the systems of health and social protection; and the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic with all its disruptive potential. They also consider the deliberate use of the concept of securitisation to convince the population of the need to take drastic safeguarding steps, including the announcement of a state of emergency. The authors conclude that the securitisation models applied in health and social security will require, after the end of the pandemic, conceptual elaboration, strategic and operational profiling, as well as an adequate regulatory framework.

Osman Kadriu focuses on states of emergency and discusses legal questions over human rights restrictions. The article examines in particular the possible abuses of human rights in the situation of a state of emergency and the legal safeguards that have been put in place. The article presents the specifics of the constitutional system of the Republic of North Macedonia, with a special analysis of the role of constitutional courts in the protection of human rights during a state of emergency, and concludes with a look at the declaration of a state of emergency in North Macedonia during the Covid-19 pandemic and at the legality of the actions of the various institutions involved.

The article by Tatjana Velkova and Temelko Risteski offers some thoughts on the social implications of the pandemic as regards labour in the early days of the health crisis in North Macedonia, focusing in particular on violations of employment rights and the problems of workers most at risk. The break in economic activities, a (further) fall in standards of living and a decline in GDP, the loss of jobs and the overall increase in unemployment rates further deepen the sense of (inter)national crisis.

Emirali Karadoğan analyses working conditions and protective measures in multinational companies during the pandemic through a case study conducted among employees at Inditex stores in Turkey. The Covid-19 pandemic has deeply affected working life and the question of whether adequate protective measures have been taken in the workplace for workers who have had to work during the pandemic is a critical one. This article examines the measures taken in respect of employees of multinational companies, highlighting the results of a survey of employees of Inditex, the Spanish ‘fast fashion’ company. Covid-19 has ruthlessly exposed both the lack of protection and the risks which workers in shopping malls face on a day-to-day basis.

Qerim Qerimi explores the underlying methodological dimension of measuring the impact or effects of the EU’s policy of conditionality in western Balkans states in the arena of human rights protection and respect for the rule of law. The article also focuses on the adequacy of the measurement instruments used to gauge the impact of this policy, based on the existing trends as well as past experience with enlargement to central and eastern Europe.

The second part of *SEER* 2021/1 reaches back to our previous focus topic, the legacy of the Dayton peace agreement.

The review essay by Christophe Solioz, ‘Catch your breath’, draws on a 2011 film project devoted to the Siege of Sarajevo and locates it in the complex ‘age of immunology’ in which we now live.

Slobodan Petrović examines the political system of Bosnia and Herzegovina along the fault lines set down in the Dayton Agreement. The author reviews some of the problems with the political system of Bosnia and Herzegovina as expressed through the constitutional provisions of the Dayton Agreement. The article then concludes that, while the Agreement brought an end to the physical violence, its creators must have been aware that the type of state system it envisaged, being composed of two entities, only put off the solution to the crucial cause of the problem.

The article by Željko Mirjanić, ‘The Dayton Agreement and social reform: *Omne principium difficile est*’, looks critically at the constitutional system of Bosnia and

Herzegovina as laid down by the Dayton Agreement and examines it from the perspective of social reform. It proceeds from the point that vital discussion on constitutional regulation is leading to a marginalisation of the discussion on harmonising domestic legislation with the EU *acquis*, which the author identifies as *conditio sine qua non* in terms of fulfilling the requirements of the Stabilisation and Accession Agreement, not least in the area of labour law, and gaining admission to the EU.

Finally, Dimitar Nikoloski analyses material deprivation in the context of employment status in post-transition North Macedonia. Drawing on SILC micro data, this article assesses the underlying causes of severe material deprivation in North Macedonia from the point of view of employment status, particularly the differences between employed and unemployed workers. The results show that employed workers face a much greater risk of severe material deprivation if they are positioned in the so-called secondary labour market; while the unemployed with low capital accumulation and those living in households with low work intensity face the highest risks of all. The article concludes with several policy recommendations for additional action to reduce severe material deprivation.

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