

International Labour Review

SPECIAL ISSUE

THE CRISIS, INEQUALITIES AND SOCIAL POLICY IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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- 289 [Introduction: Crisis, policy responses and widening inequalities in the EU](#)
Janine LESCHKE and Maria JEPSEN

Introducing the contributions to this special issue of the *International Labour Review*, this article reviews the broad phases of the economic crisis in the EU since 2008 and highlights the critical role of social policy in mitigating its initial impact on Europeans. However, the crisis and governments' policy responses have also been widening labour market inequalities between different groups within countries, the authors argue, as illustrated by the disproportionate growth of youth employment and their specific focus on gender inequality. Cross-national variations in the content and structure of stimulus and austerity countermeasures are also found to be exacerbating divergence between EU countries.

KEYWORDS: ECONOMIC RECESSION, LABOUR MARKET, SOCIAL POLICY, GOVERNANCE, EU COUNTRIES, GENDER, GENDER EQUALITY, EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY, ECONOMIC RECESSION, DENMARK, GERMANY, SLOVAKIA, UNITED KINGDOM.

- 313 [Earnings and income inequality in the EU during the crisis](#)
Paul DE BEER

The author examines the impact of the economic crisis on employment, earnings, inequality and poverty in the EU, focusing on Denmark, Germany, Slovakia, Spain and the United Kingdom during the period 2008–10. After reviewing the literature, he analyses recent trends, finding that during this stage of the crisis real wages reacted countercyclically in most countries, thus diverging from the pattern observed in previous recessions. He finds considerable cross-national variation in the severity and direction of changes in terms of inequality and poverty rates. However, he argues that inequality may widen because of the potential regressive effects of the announced austerity programmes.

KEYWORDS: WAGES, EMPLOYMENT, INCOME DISTRIBUTION, POVERTY, ECONOMIC RECESSION, DENMARK, GERMANY, SLOVAKIA, SPAIN, UNITED KINGDOM.

333 **Financing social security in the EU: Business as usual?**

Norman WAGNER

This article assesses how well welfare models with different financing mechanisms cope with a major financial crisis. It focuses on five EU countries, which represent different welfare models. It also analyses how the crisis and the associated stimulus or austerity measures changed financing, revealing a regressive impact. It demonstrates that, in the short or medium term, contribution-based social systems have more stable public finances during a recession than tax-based systems. That said, the corporatist/continental welfare model seems most likely to remain stable in the long run, in so far as it focuses on keeping employment – the system's main source of revenue – stable.

KEYWORDS: SOCIAL SECURITY FINANCING, SOCIAL SECURITY POLICY, CONTRIBUTIONS, ECONOMIC RECESSION, EU COUNTRIES.

351 **The crisis and social policy: The role of collective agreements**

Vera GLASSNER, with Maarten KEUNE

Based on an analysis of collective agreements concluded across the EU in 2008–11, the authors examine their contributions to social policy through provisions for short-time work, training, wage moderation, and flexibilization of wage setting and working time. They highlight the distinction between the public and private sectors in this respect, contrasting the former's very limited scope for integrative bargaining in the face of mounting budget deficits and austerity with the latter's (initially) more balanced trade-offs between cost competitiveness and maintenance of employment and wages, especially in countries with coordinated bargaining systems. Elsewhere, the authors argue, the outcomes look set to deteriorate further.

KEYWORDS: COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT, COLLECTIVE BARGAINING, SOCIAL POLICY, PUBLIC SECTOR, PRIVATE SECTOR, EU COUNTRIES.

377 **Tracing the fate of EU "social policy": Changes in political discourse from the "Lisbon Strategy" to "Europe 2020"**

Jean-Claude BARBIER

Analysing selected European Commission and Council documents, this article identifies the changes and enduring features of the EU social policy discourse and investigates their potential determinants. It divides this discourse into three periods: the first is associated with the "Lisbon Strategy", the second with the reforms that followed (2005–09) and the third with "Europe 2020". The most recent period has witnessed a radical marginalization and tokenization of social policy as compared with macro-economic and financial concerns. At the same time, EU institutions have increasingly encroached upon national jurisdiction over social policy. These changes seem to be explained by reshuffling among important actors.

KEYWORDS: SOCIAL POLICY, GOVERNANCE, EU COUNTRIES.

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ISSN 0020-7780
www.ilo.org/revue

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