
EDITORIAL

Transfer
2016, Vol. 22(2) 143–148
© The Author(s) 2016
Reprints and permission:
sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/1024258916634621
trs.sagepub.com



Ever since the Treaty of Rome, freedom of movement has been an important right and a core component of the founding treaties of the EU. The freedom to move freely within the European Union, as well as the freedom to take up a job in another country, is accessible to the citizens of all Member States. In addition, the European Commission has supported mobility in other ways, such as the Posted Workers Directive, introduced in 1996. Labour economists assume that labour migration on the whole has positive welfare effects and that within the eurozone labour mobility serves an important function for smoothing imbalances.

There is, however, less interest in the preconditions of labour mobility and labour migration, including the necessary safeguards for preventing a European labour market regime in which large differences in living standards between European regions lead to the exploitation of these different standards and of labour migrants. In particular, the Posted Workers Directive has created many problems, as the new Enforcement Directive (2014/67/EU) shows.

In practice, labour mobility within the EU has different effects for sending and receiving countries. Moreover, policy-makers and social partners at the national level have chosen different strategies to incorporate and regulate the increasing numbers of mobile workers. Different strategies have been embedded in different regimes of labour market institutions and have had repercussions for the working and living conditions of mobile labour.

The overall aim of this issue is to provide an empirical snapshot of how labour migration interacts with existing institutions and policies. The articles included critically analyse the challenges that labour mobility within the European Union poses, for both the sending as well as the receiving countries.¹

The first article, by Jan Cremers, presents an encompassing, historical overview of the interaction between economic freedoms and labour standards within the European Union, discussing the pitfalls and problems of the cross-border mobility of labour, as theoretically envisaged by the European institutions. Besides the European level, we find that nationally specific legal frameworks have created diverging structures for mobility.

The next three articles focus on these national legal frameworks in two receiving countries and their impact on working conditions for mobile or migrant labour. The article by Bettina Wagner and Anke Hassel looks at the meat processing sector in Germany. The article analyses how, in the absence of collective agreements, a major economy has developed a secondary labour market using posted workers from Central and Eastern European countries. The article by Thanos

1 Earlier versions of the articles in this special issue were presented during a special authors' workshop in March 2015 in Berlin, organized by the European Trade Union Institute and the Hertie School of Governance as well as in a special panel named 'Labour migration within the European Union – freedom of labour or economic outsourcing?' during the 27th Conference of the Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics in London, 2 to 4 July 2015.

Maroukis deals with temporary employment in Greece. It shows how labour market ‘flexibilization’ and segmentation in Greece have facilitated the exploitation of mobile and migrant labour in the hospitality and health care sectors. The article by Ines Wagner and Lisa Berntsen develops a typology of enforcement gaps with regard to labour protection standards in the German and Dutch construction sectors.

The impact of mobility and migration on sending countries is analysed by Michał Polakowski and Dorota Szelewa, using the example of Poland. The new Member States in Central and Eastern Europe have been sending countries of mobile labour and have benefited from it. The article by Rutvica Andrijasevic and Devi Sacchetto outlines the variety of mobility forms and migration patterns within the European Union, illustrated by the perspectives of migrant and mobile workers in a major manufacturing plant in the Czech Republic. This is complemented by the article by Leonhard Plank and Cornelia Staritz on the social upgrading and downgrading trajectories of apparel workers in Romania.

The country perspectives on labour mobility within the European Union underline the assessment that nationally specific regulations or the lack of them heavily influence the quality of freedom of movement.

Bettina Wagner and Anke Hassel