

Book Review

Labour Law and Social Security Law in Central and Eastern Europe: 20 Years of EU Membership edited by Kristina Koldinská, Grega Strban, Attila Kun, Marcin Wujczyk. (Springer's Publishing, (Vol. 26, 2025))

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The book *Labour Law and Social Security Law in Central and Eastern Europe: 20 Years of EU Membership* was published in Springer's *European Union and its Neighbours in a Globalized World* series (Vol. 26, 2025) after the academic conference held in Prague. It was edited by Kristina Koldinská, Grega Strban, Attila Kun, Marcin Wujczyk.

The research and initial academic discussions stem from the anniversary of the 2004 European Union enlargement.

1. Introduction.

There are many challenging issues in the labour and social law system of the European Union (EU). At the same time, new challenges, including new forms of employment, rapid digitalisation, demographic changes, and continuing social inequality require the EU legal system to adapt and function more effectively for all Member States, including the Central and Eastern European “new” member states. One of the major challenges facing the EU in a globalised world is maintaining a balance between social rights and economic integration.

In this context, the edited volume “*Labour Law and Social Security Law in Central and Eastern Europe: 20 Years of EU Membership*” provides an important contribution to the discussion on the development of labour and social security law in the region. The

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book is edited by distinguished scholars in the field. Kristina Koldinská is a professor at the Department of Labour Law and Social Security Law, Faculty of Law, Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic. Attila Kun is a professor and Head of the Department of Labour Law and Social Security at Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary, in Budapest, Hungary and is also affiliated with the Faculty of Public Governance and International Studies at Ludovika University of Public Service, Budapest, Hungary. Grega Strban is a professor at the Faculty of Law, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, and is also connected with the University of Johannesburg, South Africa. Marcin Wujczyk is affiliated with the Department of Labour Law and Social Policy at Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland.

The volume provides a well-structured and critical analysis of contemporary labour and social security law issues in Central and Eastern Europe. It brings together contributions from various scholars and combines theoretical analysis with practical reflections and recommendations regarding the transposition, implementation, and enforcement of labour and social law within the region.

The book consists of four main parts and 21 subchapters devoted to specific issues. The first chapter, Impact of EU Regulations on Labour and Social Law of Central and Eastern European Countries, includes contributions such as “EU-Enlargement 2004: The Founding and the Accession Member States’ View on EU Social Law” by Eberhard Eichenhofer and Kristina Koldinská, and “The Transformative Journey of CEE Countries to the EU” by Cristina Mihes.

The second part focuses on non-discrimination and equal treatment in the workplace. It addresses issues such as anti-discrimination law, gender equality, maternity and parental leave, work-life balance, and the social rights of vulnerable groups, including elderly persons and Roma children. Contributions by scholars such as Dagmara Skupień, Marcin Wujczyk, Lucie Matějka Řehořová, Aleksandar Ristovski, Henriett Rab, Márton Leó Zaccaria, and Jakub Tomšej provide both legal and social perspectives on equality within EU labour law.

The third part examines specific challenges related to social protection. The contributions analyse cross-border healthcare, social security certificates in the case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union, digitalisation in healthcare systems, reverse social dumping, long-term care, social rights of temporarily protected persons, and employment equality for persons with disabilities. The chapter includes contributions by scholars such as: Grega Strban, Martin Štefko, József Hajdú, Luka Mišič, Kristina Koldinská, Alla Fedorova and Olena Rym and Yana Simutina.

The final part is devoted to labour law challenges in Central and Eastern Europe. It discusses workforce mobility after EU enlargement, implementation and enforcement problems in EU labour law, collective bargaining, employee participation in decision-making, and recent developments related to EU Directive 2023/970. The chapter concludes with reflections on the future development of EU social law. The chapter contains contributions from scholars: Mario Vinković and Tena Konjević, Attila Kun,

Dana Volosevici, Błażej Mądrzycki and Łukasz Pisarczyk, Paulina Matyjas-Łysakowska and Kristina Koldinska.

The aim of the book is not only to examine the period of EU membership but also to provide a historical analysis explaining the roots of existing problems in several Central and Eastern European countries. The book demonstrates that, despite significant progress, important gaps still remain in areas such as social security systems, collective labour relations, and anti-discrimination law, especially regarding implementation and enforcement at the national level. By highlighting these challenges, the volume offers important insights into the future development of EU labour and social law in the context of ongoing economic and social transformation. This review will analyse the structure of the volume and evaluate its main arguments and contributions.

2. The Structure of the Book and the Main Topics of Each Study.

The chapter “EU-Enlargement 2004: The Founding and the Accession Member States’ View on EU Social Law” by Bernhard Eichenhofer and Kristina Koldinská analyses the 2004 enlargement of the EU, describing it as the realisation of a long-standing idea. After World War II and during the Cold War, this seemed unrealistic, but after the fall of the socialist system, sufficient conditions were created for Central and Eastern European countries to join the EU. While this process required major transformations in all areas of life for CEE countries, older Member States did not face such challenges, as the system had been originally designed for them. The chapter focuses on the impact of EU on social law, the transformation of national legal systems, and the strengthening of the European Social Model.

The chapter “The Transformative Journey of CEE Countries to the EU” by Cristina Miheş critically analyses labour law reforms in CEE countries after EU accession. Although these reforms, among other things, initially aimed to strengthen collective bargaining rights, they often weakened the system and created uncertainty, particularly regarding the definition of terms such as “worker.” This led to confusion for employers and reduced worker protection. Overall, the reforms sometimes weakened both employers’ and workers’ positions, while the EU still lacks clear rules on labour law to fully address these issues.

In the section on non-discrimination and equal treatment, the chapter “The Principle of Non-Discrimination in the Workplace: Judgments of the Court of Justice in Polish Cases” by Dagmara Skupień provides a critical analysis the development of anti-discrimination protection in Poland under the influence of EU law and CJEU case law. The chapter demonstrates that the broad interpretation of EU anti-discrimination provisions by the CJEU significantly strengthened the protection of workers, particularly vulnerable groups and persons engaged in atypical forms of employment.

The next chapter, “The Evolution of Polish Antidiscrimination Laws in the Workplace: A Labour Law Perspective in the Context of European Union (‘EU’) Regulations” by Marcin Wujczyk, examines the development of Polish anti-discrimination law and shows how it evolved from a passive legal principle into an active protection mechanism under the influence of EU law. In practice, Poland transformed its labour law system from a mainly formal approach into a more practical system focused on the active protection of equality and prevention of discrimination. Despite this progress, several problems still remain in the Polish labour law system, including inconsistencies with EU law, as well as issues related to the definition of “worker,” burden of proof, equal pay, and compensation etc.

“Maternity and Parental Leave Management as a Tool for Work-Life Balance” by Lucie Matějka Řehořová examines the importance of maternity and parental leave policies in achieving work-life balance within EU Member States, with particular focus on the Czech Republic. The chapter analyses the impact of Directive (EU) 2019/1158 on work-life balance, highlighting both legal developments and social realities, including gender inequality, labour market segregation, and the challenges faced by working parents. The author provides a comparative overview of maternity and parental leave systems across several EU countries and demonstrates how the Czech model differs from other European approaches due to its exceptionally long parental leave and relatively low financial support. The chapter argues that although EU legislation has positively influenced the Czech legal framework, significant challenges remain, especially regarding women’s labour market participation, equal pay, childcare accessibility, and flexible working arrangements. Overall, the work emphasizes that effective work-life balance requires not only legal regulation but also broader social, economic, and institutional support from both the state and employers.

The chapter “The Work-Life Balance in EU Law and the Quest for Substantive Gender Equality in Reconciling Work with Family Responsibilities” by Aleksandar Ristovski explains how women were traditionally connected with unpaid caregiving and family responsibilities, while men were mainly associated with paid work. The chapter shows how EU work-life balance law gradually developed from mainly protecting working women to promoting gender equality, where both women and men share work and caregiving responsibilities more equally. Through the Work-Life Balance Directive 2019/1158, the European Union made important progress in this sphere. Nevertheless, there are still many inequalities and practical challenges in achieving real equality. The author concludes that genuine gender equality requires deeper social and legal reforms that support equal caregiving responsibilities between women and men.

The chapter “Social Rights of the Elderly: Analysis from the Viewpoint of EU Social Policy, the Market and the Hungarian Law” by Henriett Rab and Márton Leó Zaccaria describes the situation of older workers, labour market and social rights in EU countries. In order to shaping practical enforcement, experience the work emphasizes the case law

of the Court of Justice of the European Union. As shown by authors, the main problem is balance between social protection and market efficiency.

The chapter “Separate and Unequal: Persistent Segregation of Roma Children in Czech Republic and Eastern Europe” written by Jakub Tomšej analyses the segregation of Roma children in the Eastern European education system, despite the existence of strong EU anti-discrimination rules. It demonstrates the gap between real-life practice and the formal legal framework, as Roma children are often unfairly placed and concentrated in segregated institutions. By analysing the case of *D.H. and Others v. Czech Republic*, the author highlights indirect racial discrimination and reflects on deeper structural inequalities. As a result, mere reliance on the judicial system is not sufficient to reduce segregation, as national implementation remains weak and inconsistent. The author emphasizes the need for stronger EU measures and a comprehensive desegregation policy to ensure equality in the education system.

Part III, “Specific Challenges for Social Protection,” includes the chapter “Cross-Border Healthcare Law Development: Connecting Points Between Slovenian and EU Law”, by Grega Strban explores the development of cross-border healthcare in Slovenia, emphasizing both national legislation and EU law. The paper analyses legal and practical complexities, including authorization procedures, reimbursement systems, and unequal access arising from diverse national frameworks. While cross-border healthcare enhances access and patient choice, it also raises concerns regarding equity, the sustainability of healthcare systems, and the balance between private sector involvement and the principle of solidarity within the EU.

The chapter “Legal Regime of the Social Security Certificate from the Perspective of the CJEU Case Law” by Martin Štefko analyses the role of PD A1 certificates in EU social security coordination. Based on the case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union, the author argues that these certificates are vital for ensuring the free movement of workers and avoiding double social security obligations. At the same time, the chapter highlights several challenges, particularly the tension between mutual trust among Member States and the risk of fraud and abuse. The discussion of the “criminal exception,” which allows national courts to disregard PD A1 certificates in cases of proven fraud, is especially noteworthy. Overall, the article provides a concise and critical assessment of the current system, emphasizing both its importance and its structural weaknesses.

“The Digital Europe Programme and Its Impact on the Hungarian Health Care System, with Special Regard to the EESZT” by József Hajdú examines Hungary’s digitalisation of healthcare through the Elektronikus Egészségügyi Szolgáltatási Tér (EESZT). It highlights how the EESZT integrates public and private healthcare providers, enabling real-time access to patient data, e-prescriptions, referrals, and health records, thereby improving diagnostic accuracy, treatment efficiency, and patient engagement. The system aligns with the EU Digital Europe Programme and Hungary’s AI Strategy. While it enhances healthcare delivery and supports telemedicine, challenges

remain regarding data privacy, legal oversight, and equitable access. Overall, the article underscores the transformative potential of digital health in Hungary.

The chapter “Social Europe, Free Movement and the Phenomenon of Reverse Social Dumping” by Luka Mišič discusses the challenges the EU faces in balancing economic integration, free movement, and social rights. The author analyses the phenomenon of reverse social dumping through examples such as Slovenia’s amendment to the Market Regulation Act and cross-border workers’ benefits. The chapter shows how these practices can conflict with EU social policies and the principle of equal treatment, while also highlighting the limits of solidarity within Social Europe.

Kristina Koldinská’s “Long-Term Care: Not a Nightmare in the EU?” chapter examines long-term care (LTC) in the EU, highlighting challenges arising from population aging, service fragmentation, and gender imbalances in caregiving. It comparatively reviews national LTC insurance systems (Germany, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and Flanders) and EU legal developments supporting social rights. The chapter emphasizes the need for integrated formal and informal care, sustainable funding, and policies promoting independence and equality for the elderly.

The chapter “Social Rights of Temporary Protected Persons in the EU: Current Challenges and Further Perspectives” by Alla Fedorova analyses how the EU protects the social rights of people under temporary protection, especially Ukrainians after 2022. It shows that while the EU Temporary Protection Directive 2001/55/EC guarantees basic rights (housing, healthcare, and aid), these remain minimal, uneven across states, and are increasingly reduced. The author concludes that legal obligations are vague, leaving displaced persons in uncertainty and highlighting the need for clearer and stronger social protection standards.

The chapter “Employment of Persons with Disabilities: How Far Is Ukraine from European Equality Standards?” by Olena Rym and Yana Simutina examines the employment of persons with disabilities in Ukraine in light of European equality standards. It argues that, despite formal alignment with international frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and progress toward European Union integration, implementation remains weak.

The authors identify key challenges, including low employment rates, ineffective quota mechanisms, and inadequate data collection. While recent reforms signal progress, the chapter concludes that substantial institutional and practical improvements are still required to achieve genuine labour market inclusion.

The chapter by Mario Vinković and Tena Konjević, “Lost in Space: CEE Countries Workforce and 20 Years of Enlargement,” provides a detailed analysis of EU labour mobility and temporary labour migration in Central and Eastern European countries. The authors critically examine the development of the case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union and the evolution of EU legal reforms, particularly the 2018 revision of the Posting of Workers Directive, which introduced a stronger emphasis on the principle of “equal pay for equal work.” The chapter also highlights the political divide

between CEE and Western Member States, especially regarding the failed “yellow card” procedure and the legal actions initiated by Hungary and Poland before the CJEU. Although CEE countries sought to preserve their economic competitiveness, the authors argue that this approach could indirectly weaken the protection of posted workers. The chapter is particularly valuable for connecting EU labour law developments with their broader socio-economic implications

“The Challenges of the Implementation of EU Labour Law in CEE-Countries, with Specific Regard to Enforcement: The Case of Hungary” by Attila Kun analyses how EU labour law is implemented in Hungarian labour law and the real-life enforcement process, including its challenges and suggestions in this context. This chapter shows how national labour law is harmonized with EU labour law, but it is mostly just a “formality” in many CEE countries; in real-life practice, it differs from the overall purpose of the EU legal system. The article is unique and original for its critical analysis, being well-structured and offering insights into the gap between EU labour law and practical application.

The chapter “Balancing Legislation and Moral Capitalism: Enhancing Employee Access to Decision-Making” by Dana Volosevici examines employee participation in corporate decision-making in the EU. It highlights how EU laws on information, consultation, and sustainability reporting aim to strengthen workplace democracy and social dialogue. The main argument is that although legislation has improved employee involvement, large differences still exist between Member States. Therefore, legal rules alone are not enough, and voluntary corporate practices also play an important role. In conclusion, the author emphasizes that a balance between regulation and corporate responsibility is necessary to achieve effective employee participation.

The chapter “From Decentralizing to Promoting Collective Bargaining: The Development of Industrial Relations in Poland”, written by Błażej Mądrzycki and Łukasz Pisarczyk, illustrates the evaluation of industrial relations in Poland in this regard. The chapter demonstrates the connection between the legal system of communism, the post-1989 transformation, and the effects of EU social policy. The strength of the article is its critical evaluation of low-effective collective bargaining and the systemic weak points of Poland. The authors also write about recent reforms and reform plans in their country and analyze them in a scholarly way. This chapter not only analyses real challenges but also provides some possible solutions.

“Selected Issues Challenging the National Legislators in Light of EP and Council Directive (EU) 2023/970” by Paulina Matyjas-Łysakowska describes the issues faced by national legislators, especially in Poland, in implementing the directive on pay transparency. Through legal and practical analysis, the chapter shows that even when equal pay is in force on paper, enforcement in practice is limited. The uniqueness of the chapter lies in its comprehensive explanation of the directive, covering possibly not only traditional workers but also non-traditional workers, with challenges examined by the Court of Justice of the EU based on its case law. The chapter also clarifies the distinction between “work of equal value” and “equal work.” To sum up, it highlights legal and

practical challenges and emphasizes the need for legal reform and improved worker protection.

“Concluding Remarks and Prospects: What Next in Social Law in the EU?” by Kristina Koldinská describes how the EU social law system has positively impacted Central and Eastern European countries. However, there are still challenges in the implementation and enforcement of these laws and their governing principles at the national level. As the author highlights, the Court of Justice of the EU plays a key role in strengthening rights. As a concluding remark, the chapter emphasizes that creating a better future for EU social law is not only about adopting new legislation but also about ensuring effective implementation and enforcement.

3 Conclusion.

In sum, the book offers a deep and wide-ranging analysis of unique, existing problems in Central and Eastern Europe in connection to EU social security and labour law. Each chapter provides a detailed and well-founded examination of the topics. The uniqueness of the book lies in its approach, which is not only deeply analytical but also highly practical.

While the book successfully highlights the achievements of European integration, it also points out the emerging challenges in Central and Eastern Europe. Due to its variety of perspectives, in-depth analysis, and clear structure, it can serve as an essential resource for scholars, students, practitioners, legislators, social partners, and policymakers in the EU social and labour law sphere. For both national and international students, the book serves as a valuable guide to understanding the complex structure of EU labour and social law and their implementation in diverse national legal frameworks, particularly through case-based analysis by the Court of Justice of the European Union.

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