



Funded by
the European Union
NextGenerationEU



the institute
of economics,
zagreb

WORKSHOP: THE EUROPEANIZATION OF SOCIAL POLICY IN SOUTH EAST EUROPE: RESPONDING TO AN AGEING POPULATION

THE INSTITUTE OF ECONOMICS, ZAGREB

Trg J. F. Kennedyja 7 (Meeting room, first floor)

Monday, 9 December 2024, 9:00 – 12:30

&

online – [Zoom access link](#)

Meeting ID: 842 6124 9976 / Passcode: 855193

SCHEDULE

- 09:00 ● Registration
- 09:30 ● Welcome Speech, *Ivana Rašić*, Director, The Institute of Economics, Zagreb
- 09:40 ● Introduction and Chair, *Danijel Nestić*
- 09:50 ● Reflections on Ageing, Social Policy and Europeanization, *Paul Stubbs*
- 10:10 ● The Case of North Macedonia, *Maja Gerovska Mitev*
- 10:30 ● The Case of Serbia, *Žarko Šunderić*
- 10:50 ● The Case of Croatia, *Siniša Zrinščak*
- 11:10 – 12:30 ● Discussion

ABOUT THE WORKSHOP

Trends in terms of an ageing population represent one of the key challenges for social protection systems, and labour markets and social policy more generally, in the countries of South East Europe. As the ratio of employed to pensioners increases, the financial sustainability of income tax-funded and insurance-based social protection systems are called into question. The adequacy of pensions for existing older people, and future generations; forms of financing for long-term care; and inequality in old age – based on gender, class, ethnicity, and citizenship status – are also fundamental questions. Against a prevailing orthodoxy of “active ageing” in which people are expected to retain some relationship to the formal labour market for much longer, the issue of the well-being of older people and their families is often given only secondary importance. In the context of very different national trends across the European Union and candidate countries, it is far from clear what role, if any, the European Union can or should play with regard to social policies and social innovation in the context of population ageing. In addition, there is a danger that, instead of looking holistically at social policy for an ageing society, the needs of children, the working age population, and older people are treated as if they were completely separate and competing demands on already stretched social protection budgets. Issues of how to prepare for an ageing society also pose stark questions about the role of the state, the family, and the local community in organising care and income maintenance, the role of transnational transfers and rights, and the impacts of new technologies.

In this workshop, social policy scholars and advocates from three countries: Croatia, North Macedonia and Serbia, will bring their experiences of and insights into these questions, focusing on:

1. The key national challenges in terms of an ageing population
2. The degree to which the social protection system is fit for purpose in meeting these challenges
3. The impacts of new technologies and the importance of social innovation
4. The current and future role of the European Union and the relevance of regional lesson learning.

The workshop forms one part of the TRADSTAR project (*"Labour Markets and Well-being in the Context of an Ageing Population"*) undertaken by a team from the Institute of Economics, Zagreb, Department for Labour Markets and Social Policy. The main goal of the project is to investigate contemporary trends in the labour market and their impact on various aspects of social well-being in the specific circumstances of population ageing and other demographic changes, and to analyse the role of economic and social policy in adapting to these circumstances.

Whilst the working language of the workshop is English, parts of the discussion, including questions and answers, may be in Croatian.

BIOGRAPHIES

Maja Gerovska Mitev is Professor of Social Policy at the Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje and editor-in-chief of the journal *Ревуја за социјална политика / Journal of Social Policy* published by the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje. She is the National Coordinator for North Macedonia in the European Social Policy Analysis Network (ESPAN) of the European Commission. She is also academic coordinator of the Central European Social Policy and Social Work Network (CESPASWON) within the CEEPUS programme. Her most recent publication is as the editor of the book *Social Work and Social Policy Transformations in Central and Southeast Europe*, which was published by Springer in 2024.

Danijel Nestić is a Senior Research Fellow in the Institute of Economics, Zagreb and project manager of the TRADSTAR project (*Labour Markets and Well-being in the Context of an Ageing Population – TRADSTAR*). His research interests include pension policy, poverty, and inequality. Specialist themes include the minimum wage, industrial relations, and wage policy. He has participated in a number of research projects commissioned by science foundations and various ministries, as well as the World Bank, ILO, and the European Commission. As a consultant to the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, and Social Policy, he was involved in drafting pension projections and background reports on Croatia for several Ageing Reports that are published by the Ageing Working Group of the European Commission. Recently, he co-authored the World Bank study *Analysis of Long-Run Pension Adequacy and Sustainability in the Croatian Pension System, With a Focus on Policy Options for Its Improvement* (not publicly available yet).

Paul Stubbs is a Senior Research Fellow in the Institute of Economics, Zagreb who works on issues of social policy and social protection at local, national, regional, and global scales. He was Coordinator of the Croatian team in the European Social Policy Network (ESPN) for the European Commission for many years. He has worked with Siniša Zrinščak on a number of studies of Croatian social policy with a particular focus on the impacts of Europeanization. He is a member of The Future of the Welfare State in the Western Balkans network and co-author, with Gordana Matković, of a paper on Future Oriented Welfare State Policies in the Western Balkans. He has co-edited a number of books on social policy including *Social Policy, Poverty, and Inequality in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union* (2019), *Transformations in Global and Regional Social Policies* (2014), and *Social Policy and International Interventions in South East Europe* (2007). His current work focuses on socialist Yugoslavia and the Non-Aligned Movement, and he is completing a book on *The New International Economic Order* for Routledge.

Žarko Šunderić is the Director of the Center for Social Policy, a Belgrade-based think tank focused on promoting inclusive growth, fostering social cohesion, and advancing a more effective welfare state. He is also a co-founder and member of the Western Balkans Network: The Future of the Welfare State in the Western Balkans, which gathers leading think-tank organisations and researchers to address welfare policy challenges. From 2008 to 2015, Žarko led the Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit within the Government

of Serbia, coordinating efforts in social inclusion and poverty reduction. He has extensive experience in adapting European social inclusion policies and introducing central government functions, including strategic planning, policy coordination, and analysis. He has worked on numerous EU-funded projects through programmes such as EaSI, IPA, and Horizon, focusing on social innovation, reducing inequality, promoting active inclusion, and advancing social inclusion.

Siniša Zrinščak is Professor and Chair of Sociology at the Faculty of Law of the University of Zagreb. He was Professor of European and Comparative Social Policy at the Department of Social Work of the Faculty of Law, University of Zagreb until 2013. His main scientific interests include religious and social policy changes in post-communism, religion and human rights, and European and comparative social policy. He has worked with Paul Stubbs on a number of studies of Croatian social policy with a particular focus on the impacts of Europeanization. He was a member of the Scientific Committee of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights – FRA (2018–2023), and has been a scientific team member for the European Values Study in Croatia since 1998.

This workshop is part of the project "Labour Markets and Well-being in the Context of an Ageing Population" at the Institute of Economics, Zagreb and funded within the National Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021-2026 - NextGenerationEU.



Funded by
the European Union
NextGenerationEU

e i z the institute
of economics,
zagreb