

Guest editor's introduction: Demographic Challenges and Economic Development

Marijana Maksimović*  Institute of Social Sciences, Belgrade, Serbia

* Corresponding author

E-mail address: mmaksimovic@idn.org.rs (M. Maksimović)

Address: Marijana Maksimović, Institute of Social Sciences, Centre for Economic Research,
Kraljice Natalije 45, Belgrade, Serbia

The thematic section “Demographic Challenges and Economic Development” comprises a review of factors that shape economic growth and development viewed through the lens of human development. Economic and demographic factors are key elements for understanding and shaping the sustainable development in modern society. The interconnectedness of these factors is clearly reflected through economic indicators such as GDP per capital, which directly depends on the demographic characteristics of the population, such as its structure and dynamics. The population of a country is simultaneously a producer and consumer of goods and services, thus directly influencing economic activities and living conditions. Changes in the population, including aging, migration and changes in the composition of the workforce, have a significant impact on the economic performance, public spending and social systems. Demographic changes affect demand, the labor market, health care and pension systems, making them important research topics in the context of economic development.

In recent years, this complex topic has been somewhat neglected due to the emergence of new topics such as digitization, artificial intelligence, geostrategic fragmentation, green economy and sustainability, energy economy, but also topics that are a direct consequence of economic and war crises, as well as the medical crisis of COVID 19. The frequency of these crises is greater than before, and the task of social sciences and institutions is to monitor the changes. The trends of depopulation, increasing inequality, impoverishment of the working class, or frequent migrations, bring us back to this topic in the form of basic economic issues such as those related to retirement, as well as those of local and corporate responsibility for safety at work, comparisons of European countries on the issue of aging, European legislation and the inclusion of vulnerable groups at work. The goal of this thematic block was to bring together researchers presenting the latest research, which should indicate the adaptation of the population to the labor market in terms of education, work skills, structural adaptation, internal and international migration.

In the research paper “Retiree Dynamics in Slovenia and the Adequacy of Minimum Pensions in Relation to GDP” by Andrej Raspor and Bojan Macuh, retirement in Slovenia is empirically shown as one of the forms of providing social security with the help of institutions.

The main finding of this paper is that in the period from 1991 to 2024, Slovenia had a small increase in population, while the number of pension beneficiaries increased. Using the method of regression analysis, correlation and t-tests, the results were obtained, which clearly state that the reduced adequacy of pensions appeared as a characteristic. The conclusion is that reforms of the pension system are necessary, so that minimum pensions do not remain below the threshold of adequacy. The article "Demographic Shift and Future Expectations of Slovak Young Adults" by David Cole, Maria Murray Svidroňová, Jolana Gubalova and Petra Strnadova, indicates that the demographic changes in post-socialist Slovakia show the tendencies of population aging and a decline in the number of the working-age population, and that this process will be irreversible until at least 2050. The main findings indicate a decline in the population of the observed age – those between 20-40 years of age – which is expressed in urban cores of Slovakia. "A Longitudinal Analysis of Functional Transformation and Demographic Change in Small Towns in Serbia" by Vlasta Kokotović Kanazir, Marija Drobnjaković and Milena Panić, analyzes the role of small towns and the demographic changes in them. The main contribution of this research is that it indicates that, with deindustrialization, small towns entered the phase of depopulation and as such were a neglected segment of the settlement network. This was also contributed by a weak functional transformation, which is expressed by the tenor diagram, indicating divergent paths of development. Research paper "The Integration's Dos and Don'ts in the Settlement of Migrants: A Comparative Perspective of Ukrainian Refugees in Poland and Moroccan in the Netherlands" by Isański et al. aims to analyze Ukrainian refugees from 2022 (2.9 million), to the present. The key contribution of this research is the finding that ghettoization and social stigmatization of the newcomers have been avoided. The conclusion is that there is no animosity towards Ukrainian newcomers in Poland. The article "Whose Crisis, Whose Gain? The Socio-economic Consequences of Care Migration from Serbia to Germany" by Dragana Stöckel and Marina Pantelić investigates the socio-economic consequences of migration that occurs in the context of the internationalization of work, and refers to the migration of care from Serbia to Germany. The case studies of Serbia and Germany indicate different ways of solving this problem. Namely, Serbia, as a country with higher middle income, relies on informal care and family systems predominantly, due to the lack of labor force. Germany, as a country with high incomes and an institutionalized system of care for the elderly, is expanding services of this type and recruiting migrant workers. Examples of other European countries point to solving this problem with the help of labor mobility. In the article "Social Inclusion of Roma through Active Labor Market Policies in Serbia" by Lara Lebedinski, Mihajlo Đukić and Dejana Pavlović, the population of Roma is observed, and it can be concluded that this community has a high unemployment rate in Serbia, and that the level of education is significantly lower than that of the majority population. A certain marginalization in the labor market was noticed, as well as discrimination, participation in informal work, gray economy, precarious forms of work, and seasonal work. All this leads to unstable income. The article "Local Governments as Missing Actors in Occupational Safety Governance" by Kaan Koçali provides an insight into how occupational safety and health are treated at the local and regional levels. The main finding of the study is that national supervision can contribute to the strengthening of local institutions and the capacities that can improve the prevention of occupational safety management. Local authorities

should coordinate preventive initiatives and provide support to businesses, especially entrepreneurial ones, i.e. small and medium-sized businesses. This assistance indicates the joint responsibility of the local community and the companies. Research paper “Corporate Social Responsibility and Health-Vulnerable Workers: Legal Concepts and Future Directions” by Sanja Zlatanović, Ranko Sovilj and Ivana Stjelja, examines corporate social responsibility related to the integration of sustainability principles, as well as social and ethnic principles. The main contribution of this research is that it represents another attempt to improve the resilience and fairness (promotion of health-prone workers in the workforce) of the labor market. From the foregoing, it can be concluded that the research papers of this thematic block only triggered an “avalanche of questions” related to economic and demographic factors of economic development, which require urgent action by public policies, While research in this vein should continue to be in focus.

The thematic edition also contains a review of the book *Visions of Inequality: From the French Revolution to the End of the Cold War*. This scientific study traces inequality through the ages, over a period of 200 years. The book uses a historical approach to income distribution, and empirical data that track inequality from the point of view of the economic population. Inequality is observed through the works of F. Kenne, A. Smith, D. Ricard, K. Marks, V. Pareto and S. Kuznets. The publication represents an authentic contribution to the study of inequality, and as such is significant for economic science and social science. The collection of papers entitled *The Geo-economic Landscape: A Market and Social Approach* is also presented, its aim being to monitor the changes in the geo-economics, conditioned by the development of China, which threatens to overshadow the dominance of the USA. It is closely followed by the changes brought about by digitalization and artificial intelligence, which affect the competitiveness of companies and the economy of countries. The structure of this collection involves two units, the economic and the social, exploring the new ways of using resources, which are intended to positively contribute to the international market. The original research papers and their findings presented therein, can be useful to researchers, doctoral students and public policy makers.

As a guest editor of the thematic block, I would like to thank the authors and reviewers who contributed with their efforts to prepare these articles into a scientific contribution worthy of attention. I would like to thank the Editor-in-Chief and the entire editorial staff for their cooperation and patience during the production process of the feature. I am extremely grateful to them for understanding the importance of this topic and its conceptual return to the focus of research in science. The last, but not least, I would like to thank my colleagues who helped me in my editorial work with their valuable suggestions.

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