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## BOOK REVIEWS

**Colin Lindsay and Donald Houston (eds.), *Disability Benefits, Welfare Reform and Employment Policy*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, xv + 244 pp., ISBN 978-0-230-34994-0 (hardcover)**

*Disability Benefits, Welfare Reform and Employment Policy* is one of the titles in the important Palgrave Macmillan series and project, *Work and Welfare in Europe*, in which a group of significant professors, researchers, sociologists, economists from European universities and institutes try to provide, through detailed analysis and academic debate, future perspectives and useful answers to questions concerned with the problems of work and welfare in modern European societies. In thirteen chapters, this book examines one of the key problems of contemporary European society, that of the very high number of disability benefits claimants, placing special emphasis on the United Kingdom, where the numbers of claimants have been rapidly increasing in recent years.

One of the editors of this interesting book is Colin Lindsay, a senior lecturer in human resource management at the University of Strathclyde, UK who has had a significant research career in the area of labour market policies and welfare reform, whose special research interests are on the relationship between health and employability and recent policies to combat labour market inequalities. The second editor is Donald Houston, a lecturer in urban studies at the University of St Andrews, UK, who has written many academic journal articles and reports spanning fifteen years on subjects including benefits, unemployment and poor health. These two editors, together with a group of twenty further authors from various academic disciplines, who specialise in the area of employment and disability benefits, have prepared a truly useful book for anyone interested in the reform of disability benefits.

The aim of the book is to promote measures which will be useful for policy makers in reducing the number of disability benefit claimants. The problem of the high number of people claiming disability benefits in the UK has become more and more serious over the decades. According to the authors, 'at the start of 2012, more than two and a half million people of working age were out of work and claiming disability benefits'. In the introductory chapter, 'Fit for work? Representations and Explanations of the Disability Benefits "Crisis" in the UK and Beyond', Lindsay and Houston lay out the major aims of the book and the research methods which are used, explaining that the book 'explores whether these policy responses are fit for purpose by presenting

evidence on why benefit rolls have risen and why some people are more likely than others to become long-term claimants of disability benefits; critically assessing the content and outcomes of recent policy in the UK, and comparing experiences in the UK with those of other welfare states'. One of the central issues of the book, present from the first to the last page, is the idea of trying to explain the disability benefits crisis as resulting from a combination of three key factors – labour market change, employability and health problems. Each of these factors is analysed in detail in a specific chapter of the book – Chapter 4: 'Are Incapacity Benefit Claimants Beyond Employment? Exploring Issues of Employability'(Green and Shuttleworth); Chapter 5: 'Redefining "Fit for Work": Welfare Reform and the Introduction of Employment Support Allowance' (Barnes and Sissons) and Chapter 6: 'A Health Problem? Health and Employability in the UK Labour Market" (Warren, Garthwaite and Bamba) – and recommendations are presented for possible policy countermeasures and further possible action.

Two of the book's noteworthy strengths are its interdisciplinary approach and the presentation of cross-national research. Experts from a variety of disciplines including economic geography, social policy, sociology, occupational medicine, public health studies and law present detailed surveys, providing readers with a unique and clear approach which will be very useful to anyone interested in disability benefits and related issues. Further, excellent comparative methods are evident in the cross-national research by authors who present comparisons of the UK with Germany, Sweden, The Netherlands and New Zealand – Chapter 9: 'Germany: Attempting to Activate the Long-Term Unemployed with Reduced Working Capacity' (Brussig and Knuth); Chapter 10: 'Incapacity Benefits – Change and Continuity in the Swedish Welfare State' (Ulmestig); Chapter 11: 'From Dutch Disease to Dutch Fitness? Two Decades of Disability Crisis in the Netherlands' (Berkel) and Chapter 12: 'New Zealand's Reform of Sickness Benefit and Invalid's Benefit' (Lunt and Horsfall). In each case, recommendations are presented for possible policy countermeasures and further possible action. These chapters give readers the opportunity to learn something new about the way other countries implement disability benefits reforms using a variety of measures. The measures applied in the included countries will be helpful for experts from countries which have yet to adopt reforms, in choosing the best corresponding model for reducing the number of claimants who receive disability benefits.

I leave the readers to enjoy the remaining absorbing chapters not described in this review, which also deal with disability benefits reforms in interesting ways. This book includes a number of case studies, statistical data and analyses of disability benefits claimants, as well as a number of figures and tables, which assist readers in understanding and comprehending this problem.

In summary, the book is an excellent choice for all who are interested in this hot topic, especially those engaged in research in the area of welfare reform and disability benefits, and for policy makers. It is very precise in style, and comprehensible even for those who are not specialists in this subject matter, for whom reading this book

will provide a vivid picture of potential future welfare reforms to disability benefits systems.

**Filip Bojić**

*Faculty of Law*

*University of Belgrade*

Filip Bojić is a teaching assistant in Labour and Social Law in the Faculty of Law, University of Belgrade. In 2012 he was awarded the degree of Master of Social Security Law by the Catholic University of Leuven. He is currently a PhD student at the University of Belgrade. His interests include social security law, especially the areas of unemployment insurance and survivors and old age pensions.

**Maria Korda, *The Role of International Social Security Standards: An in-depth study through the case of Greece*, 2013, Cambridge: Intersentia, 763 pp., ISBN 978-1-78068-165-8 (hardcover)**

Maria Korda's book is published as volume 32 in the very well established *Social Europe Series*. It reflects the recently renewed interest in international social security standards, formulated within the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Council of Europe. It might be anticipated that it would be quite a challenge to promote new (advanced) standards during a time of economic crises, when it is evident that there is a widespread trend towards reductions in social security benefits and an emphasis on individual (private) responsibility for income.

A challenge for researchers has been to explore the reasons for adopting, or not adopting, international social security standards and assembling evidence for success (or otherwise) in their implementation. There have been several academic publications on these topics, mainly from Frans Pennings' research group at the University of Tilburg, but also from social security scholars in other universities.<sup>1</sup>

This book comes from the Tilburg research group and comprises Maria Korda's doctoral thesis. This explains the rather detailed introduction which includes a number of interesting historical insights and a developmental review of standards (revealing why, in the EU, any general harmonisation of social security was considered unnecessary),<sup>2</sup> as well as a very systematic and precisely defined research problem. The main research question concerns the identification of obstacles to the further

<sup>1</sup> For instance, Pennings (2006, 2007); Dijkhoff (2011); Becker, Ulrich, Pennings and Dijkhoff (2013).

<sup>2</sup> The right to social security was only implicitly recognised with the inclusion of the social policy chapter in the primary EU law, mentioning the respect of fundamental social rights enshrined in the (initial) European Social Charter. In this context the Charter of fundamental rights of the EU (with its advantages and drawbacks) might also be mentioned.