

## Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations



*Handbook on In-Work Poverty*, Edited by Henning Lohmann and Ive Marx (2018) Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd., 508 pages. ISBN: 978-1-78471-562-5

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job insecurity. Country differences in the manifestations of the precarious work are provided in this part of the book. In the third part of the book, country dissimilarities in three dimensions of well-being are examined: economic insecurity; the transition to adulthood and family formation; and subjective well-being. This is one of the most interesting parts of the book. In this section, we see how the variations in social welfare protection institutions and policies play a major role in differences in economic insecurity in rich capitalist economies. The effects of these protections and policies (or their lack of) on individuals are examined for young workers in establishing their work and personal lives, careers and families. Lastly this section examines the country differences in subjective well-being, which is an overall indicator of the quality of life. How the generosity of social welfare protections, along with strong active labour market policies enhances subjective well-being in a country is presented in this part. The final part of the book discusses how workers, social movements, and governments responded to the rise of precarious work. The author also outlines the elements of a political and social contract between workers, their employers, and governments that have the potential to collectivize the risks of precarious work. The author also provides suggested actions needed to implement such a contract. The conclusion section summarizes main findings of the book and provides possible future scenarios for employment relationships.

This book makes a valuable contribution to the literature on employment relationships. By focusing on countries that have similar, that is, capitalist, political and economic foundations, the author shows how different responses to precarious work are provided based on the country's institutions and policies, that is, their cultural foundations, and how the relationships between actors in the economic, political and social system are established. The

different responses to precarious work in the country, then show why the effect of precariousness is different on individuals and their families in the countries studied. The author argues that, though the rise and persistence of precarious work is creating anxiety and uncertainty for individual workers, organizations, and governments, this challenge could be responded to with policies and practices that promote both economic growth and workers' well-being.

The book should be of interest to a broad international audience of industrial relations and human resource management specialists, economists, sociologists, political scientists, as well as legal scholars. I would strongly recommend this book to the readers of *R/IR* who are interested in precarious work, flexibility, workplace changes, and the role of institutions and policies in these changes.

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### **Handbook on In-Work Poverty**

Edited by Henning Lohmann  
and Ive Marx (2018) Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd., 508 pages.  
ISBN: 978-1-78471-562-5.

Henning Lohmann is Professor of Sociology at the University of Hamburg, Germany. Ive Marx is Professor of Socio-Economic Sciences at the University of Antwerp, Belgium. Each of these two authors have published a substantial number of studies on low-paid work and/or in-work poverty, income inequality, and related labour market and public policy issues. Thus, they make a formidable pair of editors for this compilation.

In their introductory chapter, these two authors and editors articulate the purposes of this book. They sought to explore the growing and prevalent worldwide phenomenon of in-work poverty (IWP), and to do

so by looking at its reality from different countries, including those outside of the industrialized world, and to analyze it via quantitative and qualitative approaches. After establishing the focus on IWP, the editors set out to establish how and why it is so prevalent, important, and unjust. They achieve this via a systematic, conceptual, and statistical introduction to IWP, and then layer on a range of studies looking at it from household, societal, national, and supranational perspectives.

While the term 'in-work poverty' might seem unusual to some, statistics are presented to show that 'working poor' is actually a less precise term than the former. Simply put, the vast majority of the world's poor people work. Thus, adding 'working' to 'poor' is redundant, and even misleading. Similarly, a compelling case is made, repeatedly throughout numerous chapters, that focusing solely on low-waged workers also misses the point, because poverty (and its policy remedies) should be examined at a household, not individual, level. As a result, a key message emerging from this volume is that it is necessary to look at the interrelated issues of hourly wages, workweek lengths, annual paid hours worked (i.e. seasonal and non-standard work schedules), family size, the level and accessibility of social payments, and number of household earners. Although one might hope to read examples where poverty has been solved, the presented statistics show that it continues to be an issue throughout jurisdictions in the developed and developing world, to varying degrees. But, at least, readers can find solace in the examples where (in-work) poverty is relatively rare and/or shrinking. For instance, the incidence of IWP is as low as 2% in Finland. On the other hand, in Finnish households with dependent children and only one earner, that rises to over 10%. Yet, that pales to rates of 20% or more in Germany, France, and Italy for similar households.

This compilation consists of a weighty 508 pages spread among 26 chapters, and suffice to say that it is not light reading. Certainly, the editors achieve their stated objectives, and credit must be shared with the impressive and diverse set of chapter authors who represent academic backgrounds ranging from community health, sociology, geography, and policy studies, as well as educational institutions across five continents. In addition to cross-country comparisons, there are also chapter studies zeroing in on IWP and gender gaps, immigrants' experiences, and child care availability. One overriding theme, though, is that IWP is more prevalent among those who work less than full-time, full-year paid hours, especially in jurisdictions with limited social payments. Thus, the relationships between IWP and atypical work, and with informal sector employment, as well as with social funding, are important inclusions. Moreover, in books like these, the geographic focus tends to be limited to Europe and North America. In contrast, this compilation includes a chapter on IWP in the developing world broadly, and then separate analyses on Latin America, South Africa, East Asia, India, and Israel.

The sheer size of the text has positive and daunting effects. It is detailed to be sure, but borders on being overwhelming for readers who try to synthesize all of the chapters and ideas. Yet, it is indisputably a fascinating and convincing examination of a relevant and important phenomenon. On the negative side, because of the large number of chapters from different co-authors and the sheer length of this compilation, the book becomes slightly repetitive in parts. Also, the definition of IWP could be debated. In this book, IWP is usually defined as working at least part of the year and being in a household with total disposable income substantially less than the national median income. While this is a reasonable definition and one that has been used elsewhere, it does mean, in practice, that there

will be some tangible level of IWP in all studied jurisdictions (since income dispersion occurs everywhere). Does being well below average necessarily mean poverty? Of course, defining a boundary between (generally) working versus (generally) not working is a subjective one, as is the choice to use a relative versus absolute measure of being low-income (or living in poverty) within a given country (see Chapters 2 and 4 for explorations of these issues).

As a final thought, it is difficult to identify specifically when and where this book *could* be used within academia. It seems unlikely that it could be used as the assigned text for any existing course within North American business, economics, or public policy programs. But, as a detailed and convincing analysis of the inequities that exist today, this book would be an invaluable reference source for anyone studying contemporary labour markets or employment issues, and public policy remedies.

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### **Informal Workers and Collective Action: A Global Perspective**

Edited by Adrienne E. Eaton, Susan J. Schurman and Martha A. Chen (2017) Ithaca/London: ILR Press/Cornell University Press, 284 pages. ISBN: 978-1501-705564.

Instead of asking whether informal workers (IW) are able to organize themselves, the time has come to ask what lessons can be learned from the way they organize and act collectively. This is probably the main point of this book, which is to report on «success stories», i.e. struggles led by informal workers, salaried or self-employed, that have led to the improvement of their working conditions or the acquisition of rights.

The nine examples in this book each take place in a different country: street

vendors in Monrovia, Libya; waste pickers in Brazil; young Cambodian women working on commission from Cambrew brewing company in cafés and restaurants and being harassed; port workers in Colombia; informalized retail and hotel workers in South Africa; salaried but informal or self-employed minibus drivers in Georgia; domestic workers in Uruguay; low-wage Tunisian government workers subcontracted to multiple labour intermediaries; Haitian immigrants working informally in construction and private households.

As already shown in a growing literature on this subject, informal workers' struggles are based on a wide variety of ways of organizing themselves, ranging from forms of unionism—by joining existing unions or by creating new ones—to member associations or cooperatives. The case studies presented in this book are no exception. Sometimes conducted over several years, they also shed light on how different types of populations, sometimes very young, such as street vendors in Monrovia, Libya—often women, in some cases victims of harassment—manage to be recognized as workers, that is, as people worthy of rights because they make a useful contribution to society. In this way, we could express this “moral claim” that the authors see going through all the cases reported. These cases also show the importance of the support provided, whether from traditional trade unions and/or the State apparatus, through different channels, thus supporting the bargaining power first and foremost, as well as the associative power, of informal workers.

However, the cases presented were not selected from any form of organisation, despite the initial temptation. The cases were chosen at the request of Solidarity Center (created by the AFL-CIO to support the development of workers' empowerment for their dignity and rights). Solidarity Center has assigned the selection of cases of informal workers' organizations to Rutgers University, while the identifica-