



Informality, Labour Mobility and Precariousness: Supplementing the State for the Invisible and the Vulnerable

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There is a relatively abundant number of scientific sources and studies regarding the informal economy and international labour mobility. Until now, there was almost no research simultaneously considering both phenomena, their development and characteristics. It is quite hard to explain this lack of research, but some of the reasons could be the complexity of the topics, insufficient and unreliable data, impossibility of examining something that has been mostly hidden and/or determined by many intertwined links and mutual influences. Therefore, one should really praise the new publication *Informality, Labour Mobility and Precariousness: Supplementing the State for the Invisible and the Vulnerable*, edited by Abel Polese, in which many authors shed light from various standpoints on the importance and consequences of the unofficial economy and migration in many countries around the world.

In the introductory note, the editor explains the main goals and intentions of the book and explains that the authors prepared case studies contributing to a better understanding of the ways informality manifests itself. These analyses of the relationship between informality and mobilities are intended to encompass the complexity of cultural practices in everyday life. The authors in the book clearly show that many people alongside the usual pull factors for emigration such as higher wages, better working conditions and broader possibilities for professional promotion, also emigrate due to push factors – inadequate governance, widespread corruption, low quality of public goods in their native countries.

The book consists of three parts and four contributions, in the first part assessing a phase of emigration in the new society and economy. All research presented show new ways in which people avoid the burden of state regulations and institutions. Fradejas-García, Molina and Lubbers analyse the life and work of Romanian migrants in Spain and their adjustment to the new cultural context. During such a process, emigrants develop a transnational social field, networks of personal relationships that extend across national borders and enable the successful exchange of ideas, practices, and resources as well efficient and adequate incorporation into the new societal and cultural context.

As Poland has emerged as an attractive immigration destination, Bielenin-Lenczowska and Patzer present in this interesting text, a result from their survey on the character of a suburban neighbourhood in the outskirts of Warsaw. Migrants mostly settle in the cheaper parts of the city, which they domesticate and reorganize in various ways, leaving hints of their presence and slowly becoming visible in the public space. The authors were connected with many migrants and collected their individual life stories. Very often, many immigrants are exposed to abuse, discrimination and exploitation by employers and have limited possibilities for integration into the official labour market. However, messages disseminated through migrant networks help those without employment and connections to earn some income and survive in unwelcoming circumstances.

Banović, Škokić and Alpeza examine the informal networks among immigrant entrepreneurs in Croatia. From previous literature, it is well known that Hispanic, Chinese, and Korean entrepreneurs who immigrate to North America very often use already existing ethnic communities. However, similar surveys concerning entrepreneurs from South-Eastern Europe countries have been rare. Therefore, the aim of their study is to examine networking activities among ethnic entrepreneurs in Croatia, an economy with low rates of immigrants and a increasing waves of emigration. The authors show that already developed in-group cooperation and support among immigrant entrepreneurs are very important measures for resolving problems of the Croatian entrepreneurial environment, primarily linked to the unfavourable business climate and widespread corruption. In Croatia, to have *veza* (informal connection) is a very important factor for access to entrepreneurship, to start a small firm with only limited resources and to mitigate the drawbacks of an underdeveloped and unsupportive institutional framework, weak enforcement of property rights, high level of corruption, and an inadequate and hostile business environment.

After presenting a short history of philosophical attitudes towards the role of the state in the regulation of the international migration and labour mobility, Daniel Kashnitsky reminds us that state boundaries delimit people into those who are expelled instantaneously and those who are included, but mostly as illegal migrants. His contribution analyses the position of migrants living with HIV in Russia, who are almost always exposed to social exclusion and very often are deported to their native state, in a process characterised by unequal treatment and arbitrariness. Using the data obtained from performed semi-structured interviews with undocumented labour migrants and recorded cases from one NGO that aids and accompanies migrants with HIV, the author concludes that illegal migrants in Russia are kept in legal uncertainty, so they never know exactly how many documents they need to collect to be eligible for medical care, to be able to work legally and freely move in the city.

The second part of the book titled *Staying*, begins with the contribution by Johanna Paquin on the tax morale of small businesses in Armenia and Georgia. Such analysis is particularly interesting because two neighbouring countries significantly differ in their economic policies: while Georgia is a positive example of a top reformer, very active and successful in eradicating corruption, reforming the business environment, improving government effectiveness and developing democratic institutions, the situation in Armenia is quite the opposite. Regarding the share of informal economy in GDP, the situation is paradoxical, as the mentioned share is higher in Georgia, which is probably *trapped in informality*. It is hard to provide a simple explanation of this unexpected empirical situation, but it is probably caused by bigger institutional incongruence and weaker enforcement power of formal institutions in the implementation of laws and regulations in Georgia than in Armenia.

Aimar Ventsel writes on the informal moral economy of the Russian Far East, concretely the Yakutsk region, which is characterised by an obsolete economic structure, a high share of big companies in regional GDP, and the importance of the public sector as the main source of income. There is a complex link between the state and entrepreneurship, intertwined via various forms of corruption, networking and social links. In such circumstances, entrepreneurs lose any contact with the state and try to avoid social or economic ties with state structures. One consequence of such an attitude is the conscious decision to be active mostly in the shadows, evading tax obligations. Due to the harsh climate and unfavourable living conditions, they are very devoted to supporting their relatives, friends, neighbours and kin people through strong reciprocal ties, fully aware of the importance of peer networks.

Aneta Strzemzalska analyses cultural policy and local actors' agenda in Azerbaijan through a musical genre called *meykhana*. The author studies how the interplay between formal and informal approaches can be used in research on the nation-building process. In the previous time, there were actual efforts to subordinate *meykhana* performers to the state's interests, which were primarily meant to promote this music form as one of the main categories of folk art. In the hope of improving their social status, performers, named *meykhanachis*, using various methods successfully institutionalized and standardized their creative activities. This motivated the authorities to accept *meykhana* as a type of "invented ethnic tradition" and use it as the country's representative national symbol.

The last contribution in this part of the book prepared by Polese, Urinboyev, Svenson, Adams and Kerikmäe, is based on extensive ethnographic field research, examining the illegal, immoral, and illegitimate forms of governance in Uzbekistan. According to the World Bank definition, governance is the mixture of traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised. The Uzbek state is, without doubt, powerful in using coercion and preventing political instability, but it is quite weak in terms of enforcing the "rule of law" and efficient delivery of public services.

The third part of the book titled *Competing* begins with a contribution by Anil Duman dedicated to the link between various forms of informality and policy preferences in the Middle East and Northern Africa. Such activities are quite widespread and deeply rooted in the economies and societies of the observed areas and exhibit no signs of reduction. Formal workers show slightly higher trust in the government than informal, while almost 47% of the informal workers and 38% of the formal workers do not trust the government at all. The author deems that people in the upper layer of the informal sector, who get expelled from the formal sector, might regard formal and informal behaviours as complementary and tolerate their highly gratifying informal activities. Paradoxically, their trust in the government is expected to be positive despite their informal activities. On the other side, persons who are involuntarily in precarious and badly paid jobs in the

informal sector might have more negative opinions about the government, especially concerning its incapacity to generate more official jobs and achieve a greater redistribution of wealth in the society.

Lebanese political elites developed a system that protects and ensures the persistence of monopolies, disincentivizes the creation of an adequate authority responsible for the protection of competition while diminishing the capacity and accountability of responsible institutions. An empirical case study by Joseph Helou presents the history of the Lebanese state's public finance mismanagement that led to the sovereign debt crisis of 2020 and drove the country into an economic cliff. Such conditions forced many people to take part in economic activity in the informal sector and required citizens to accept a new tacit social contract with the state. Drucă and Ianole-Călin analyse the current situation in Romania, which has been characterised by a large number of healthcare staff leaving the country. Although the doctors' remunerations recently significantly improved, for nurses and other healthcare support professionals it remained the same. The authors consider factors that offer reasons to leave, like better opportunities for professional development and a more agreeable working environment. On the other hand, they analyse the reasons to stay, measured through several dimensions of satisfaction at the workplace like working conditions, improved professional opportunities, fair evaluation and possibilities for further education and training. They conclude that overall satisfaction is not associated with an inclination to seek for fairer and more responsible working environments, and that temptation for mobility proves not to be related to any of the dimensions accounting for professionals' satisfaction at their current workplace.

Ismailbekova and Baialieva direct their attention toward the relationship between smartphone applications and new forms of informality by Kyrgyz people in the country and abroad. The authors, through many interviews and focus groups, collected opinions of different generations of citizens and how their age and identity influence their access to information services and opportunities. New mobile technology possibilities have enabled migrants to stay in touch with their families and friends and permitted them political, social and economic inclusion. They can much easier help each other in case of need, and share information about reliable networks and needed services, for example, information about informal support for adequate healthcare provision and enrolment in kindergartens and schools. Such exchange of information on informal support is much more accepted by the younger generations.

Petru Negură examines the employment opportunities for homeless people in Moldova in the context of the post-Soviet transformation. The majority of homeless persons are excluded from the formal labour market and forced to engage in various forms of informal economic activities in precarious jobs which help them to survive, but also tend to perpetuate their social and economic vulnerability. Almost half of the interviewees intend to obtain the necessary identity documents

for employment, while fewer than one-fifth plan to get a job. They do not worry about labour activity in informal jobs as long as they receive an income. However, such jobs enable limited access to medical services, inability to receive unemployment benefits in the case of joblessness and pension rights once the person becomes old. Furthermore, these jobs are also characterised by actual remuneration that is significantly lower than the amounts agreed or even by the lack of any payment. The government has begun a programme for the formalization of unregistered work, which should positively affect workers' rights and establish better conditions for employment of informal workers, including homeless persons.

In conclusion, we can say that the publication *Informality, Labour Mobility and Precariousness* is an interesting and valuable book that covers the neglected intersection of different forms of informality and migration. The authors consider the analysed themes from various standpoints, while the editor very successfully selected topics that should be of interest to experts in the field as well as to the broader community of readers.