social and legislative. A brief foray into the past of this social phenomenon is made and the way in which the Church has reported and been involved over time. References to human trafficking, in the form of slavery at that time, in reference texts such as the Old Testament, are also discussed. The four stages of human trafficking are presented next and the fact that *"those who directly or indirectly support this phenomenon, namely consumers or clients"* (p. 175). A very important element brought to the discussion by the author is that as long as there are clients or consumers, the phenomenon of human trafficking will not disappear like any supply and demand relationship. The final part of the chapter presents the existing legal provisions in the field at European and national level, relevant statistics to have a holistic picture of the phenomenon. The scientific approach culminated in the completion of six interviews with people from the church field who brought to the forefront the involvement of the Church in reducing this social phenomenon. In conclusion, this interdisciplinary approach in which the authorities in the field have worked in close collaboration with the Church through *"the involvement of priests in the prevention and social reintegration activities of victims"* (p. 207) is a real benefit to contemporary society.

The conclusions of the work focus on its interdisciplinary nature and rigorous theoretical foundation. Through the four themes addressed: systemic counseling, young NEETs, migrants, victims of human trafficking, the book *"responds to a pressing need in the field of social assistance and public policies: that of rethinking social cohesion, solidarity and interpersonal support in a context marked by fragmentation and uncertainty"* (p. 216).

In the book we are able to find relevant concepts from psychology, sociology, social work and theology, which are correlate with concrete social realities. Qualitative studies and practical analysis demonstrate a good mastery of applied research methodology. The volume also contributes to the consolidation of a relational paradigm in social intervention, offering a replicable model of analysis and action in contexts of vulnerability.

Geta Mitrea

SIMONA ILIE, *Incomes and social protection in Romania*, Bucharest, Pro Universitaria, 2024

In *Incomes and Social Protection in Romania*, Simona Ilie provides a comprehensive overview of the formation, distribution, and legal framework of population incomes in Romania, including the main social protection mechanisms associated with income policies. The volume brings together theoretical perspectives and long-term analysis, based on statistical series, legislative sources, and qualitative data. Written in Romanian, the book addresses a central topic in social policy and quality-of-life studies through an interdisciplinary approach at the intersection of economic, social, and policy analysis. According to the author, the work should enable a better understanding of the (redistributive) issues that govern household budgets and a more acute evaluation of income policies (p. 11).

The volume is structured into several large thematic chapters that span both a conceptual and a secular timeframe from the end of the First World War through 2020. From the outset, the author clarifies the analytical framework for analysing population incomes, emphasising their dual nature: as individual resources for meeting daily needs and aspirations, and as outcomes of broader economic

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and social arrangements (pp. 13−18). Income formation is discussed in relation to primary distribution, redistribution, and the role of social policies in correcting market imperfections (pp. 18−25). This choice places the author's approach to income policies within the field of social policy, rather than treating them exclusively as an economic issue.

The first chapter focuses on the theoretical aspects of population incomes (pp. 15−28). It introduces key definitions, income types, and household-level sources, while also discussing income from both micro and macro perspectives. The author reviews major theoretical approaches concerning equality, freedom, and social justice, outlining how different ideological positions shape income policies and social protection systems. Chapter two provides an overview of the welfare state as a central institutional framework for income redistribution and social protection, outlining its main functions, typologies, and historical development (pp. 29−52). The chapter situates the Romanian case within broader international and European debates on welfare state models, offering the conceptual background necessary for the subsequent empirical analysis. Overall, these two chapters provide a useful conceptual background, especially for readers less familiar with the theoretical aspects regarding income distribution and the welfare state.

The subsequent three chapters form the core of the book, as they focus on an empirical and historical analysis of incomes in Romania. The book offers a thorough examination of employment, income and wages dynamics across three main "development periods" (p. 11): interwar capitalism, communism, and post-communist capitalism. Notably, the author designates the former and the latter through their socio-economic system, but the middle one through its political system. Thus, the book's timeframe spans nearly a century, from the 1920s to the 2020s. Chapters three and four feature analysis of employment (pp. 68−82), work migration (internal and external, pp. 83−97), education and workforce training (pp. 98−102), wages and welfare (pp. 123−154), taxation of labour-related income (pp. 155−162), social care (pp. 163−184), and incomes policy, with a particular emphasis on the post-communist capitalist period (pp. 185−191). Overall, specific attention is paid to changes in employment, urban−rural differences, and shifts in the socio-occupational structure. The author documents the decline in employment during the post-communist transition, the role of agriculture and self-employment in absorbing labour, and the long-term consequences of these transformations for income levels and inequality. A full sub-chapter on contemporary rural employment and income issues uses qualitative data (pp. 103−121).

A significant portion of the book, which spans several chapters, focuses on social transfers and the social protection safety net. The author provides a thorough historical review of family benefits, child allowances, social assistance benefits, and minimum income schemes, highlighting changes in eligibility criteria, benefit levels, and policy objectives over time (pp. 95−170). The analysis covers both universal and means-tested benefits and shows how social protection measures have evolved in response to economic constraints, demographic changes, and European policy frameworks. The discussion is supported by numerous factual and legislative references, some of which are structured in tables. The reader is offered a clear overview of how social benefits have been structured and restructured over time.

Living standards, poverty, and income inequality form a major theme of the book, with chapter five covering the post-communist capitalist period (pp. 192−224). The contribution of wages, pensions, and social transfers to overall income inequality is analysed from 1990 to the early 2020s period, including the years following the 2008 financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. These sections rely on microdata from household budget surveys and provide robust empirical evidence on the redistributive effects of social transfers, particularly non-pension benefits.

Another important theme of the volume is the role of European integration and policy coordination. In chapter five, the author also discusses the influence of European social objectives, such as social inclusion and poverty reduction, on national income and social protection policies. Concepts such as active inclusion, flexicurity, and minimum income guarantees are presented in relation to their adoption and adaptation in the Romanian context. This discussion places Romanian income policies within a broader European framework, while also highlighting national peculiarities.

The book ends with a concluding section in which the author reviews income policies and their relationship with several development-related variables over a century-long period from the 1920s to the 2020s (pp. 224−234). The author starts with a brief comparison between the three development periods − interwar capitalism, communist regime, post-communist capitalism −, highlighting their commonalities and differences, especially about the development issues, income policies and distribution. For instance, the author finds that a minimum wage regulation in trade and industry was "not necessary" in the interwar period (p. 225). The income policy under post-communist capitalism kept the minimum wage at a very low level for over 25 years. However, the author expresses concerns about the policy to increase the minimum wage from 2017 onwards, citing "its effects on employment", which "need to be monitored" (p. 230). One of the main issues for Romania over the book's century-long timeframe is the development gap, as reflected in the employment structure, according to the author (p. 230). In the academic debate over the moment when the transition to capitalism ended, Simona Ilie views the year 2000 as the time stamp, citing deep reforms with direct impacts on incomes, changes in employment and fiscal law, and shifts in income dynamics and income inequality (p. 228). Each development period features its own paradoxes concerning policies and outcomes. For instance, the communist period saw "an aggressive drive for resource equality" (p. 227). Still, it did not reduce some of the urban−rural disparities in living standards, and it preserved a disproportionate gap between employees and those in other forms of employment, especially the peasantry (p. 232). Turning to the "new capitalism" period (p. 229), Romania ranks among the highest in income inequality and at-risk-of-poverty levels in the European Union, both before and after social transfers (p. 233). Urban−rural disparities are among the highest in Europe. People living in remote, scattered rural settlements, untouched by Communist corporatisation, now lacking utilities and infrastructure, are the most vulnerable (p. 233). The author highlights several causes: a taxation system that, while framed in liberal terms, effectively protects high incomes; low tax collection rates; a neo-liberal approach; and a welfare system, including social care, shaped by neoliberal considerations (p. 231, 233). Based on these arguments, Simona Ilie concludes that "Current characteristics of social protection and living standards bring Romania closer to the profile of the Baltic states and even some Southern European Mediterranean countries." (p. 232). Under these conditions, the author thinks the population's expectations for better welfare are "unrealistic, as are expectations of Romania's convergence with the European model, where no country exhibits such a level of liberal exposure." (p. 233−234) Simona Ilie concludes the book with a call to "(re)define social priorities and to articulate an integrated model of distributive justice, aligned with European development principles while adapted to national development priorities." (p. 234)

Overall, the book is a valuable contribution to the study of income policies and social protection in Romania. The volume is characterised by its extensive use of factual (statistical) data, legislative analysis, and historical depth. It is particularly useful for researchers, students, and policy analysts interested in social policy, income inequality, quality of life, and the development of the welfare state in Romania. By bringing together theoretical considerations and detailed empirical material, the book offers a highly valuable reference point for further research on incomes and social protection in contemporary Romanian society, as well as for any future research on the social history of Romania and/or on quality-of-life dynamics for the period since the First World War.

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