

# **Innovative trade union practices addressing growing precarity characterised by rescaled governance and the shrinking welfare state: the case of Slovenia**

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## **Introduction**

This chapter explores innovative trade union practices addressing precarity in Slovenia. It conceptualises precarity as vulnerability and disaffiliation that does not only affect one's job quality or hinders one's integration into the labour market but also one's inclusion in the broader social system and access to rights that used to be part of the established compromise of Keynesian welfare states. This poses challenges for the representation of the growing number of precarious workers and 'non-deserving' (non)citizens who have been excluded from the labour market and broader social and rights systems. The wider conceptualisation of precarity serves as a point of departure upon which innovation within the Slovenian trade union movement is assessed; it also determines the selection of presented case studies in this chapter.

The erosion of labour and social rights brought de-unionisation and interest fragmentation, but it also stimulated innovative forms of organising of increasingly precarious and non-unionised workers and (non)citizens. This chapter focuses on several initiatives that have emerged during the crisis within or in close relation to Slovenia's biggest trade union confederation. These have brought important innovations to traditional trade union activities such as the involvement of diverse target groups, the creation of innovative organisational structures and the use of non-traditional strategies to address rescaled class politics and labour market governance. These initiatives are the Counselling Office for Migrants project; trade union Young Plus; and the Movement for Decent Work and Welfare Society, together with the recently established Trade Union of the Precarious.

The chapter is structured as follows. Section 1 begins by providing background information on the Slovenian trade union movement and its development, especially in regard to how it was affected by the current economic crisis. This particular context is also used to provide key concepts related to rescaled governance, changing welfare states and growing precarity. Section 2 presents each of these initiatives and its innovative characteristics. These are then jointly discussed and assessed in Section 3.

## **1. Slovenian trade union movement in the time of crisis**

Up until its EU accession, Slovenia had centre-left coalition governments and strong unions and employers' organisations, which generated a neo-corporatist compromise focusing on job protection and wage regulation (Bohle and Greskovits 2012; Stanojević

and Klarič 2013). Along with the other social partners, representative trade unions have been members of the Economic and Social Council (ESC), which was founded in 1994 and which consolidated democratic relationships between the social partners (Stanojević and Broder 2012). However, Slovenia's relatively stable employment and social security system came under pressure with the country's entry to the EU in 2004 and to the European Monetary Union (EMU) in 2007. These two processes brought about external shocks in the form of a fixed exchange rate and competitive pressures, as well as more invasive EU policy initiatives and governance techniques (Leskošek 2014; Stanojević and Klarič 2013). In effect, the Slovenian neo-corporatist model acquired features of 'competitive corporatism', which manifested itself in the policy of wage restraint, the intensification of work and increased pressures on the labour force through tighter managerial control and working time extensions (Stanojević and Broder 2012). These trends became particularly pronounced following the outbreak of the global economic and internal political crisis in Slovenia, which led to the 8 per cent drop of GDP in 2009, increased public debt, the decline in exports and subsequent austerity measures (Stanojević and Klarič 2013).

The transition towards 'competitive corporatism' was shaped through the process of so-called rescaling, in which systems of meta-governance on the national and international scale increasingly guided local policies and politics and had an impact on relations amongst various actors (Peck 2002; Sadler 2000; Samaluk 2017). After the outbreak of the economic crisis, EU supranational economic governance became much more comprehensive and intrusive. It turned from soft to hard law that came to resemble executive orders, demanding stricter economic and budgetary surveillance and fiscal discipline from EU member states. It also introduced a more prescriptive approach to social policy reform that obliged EU Member States to use social policy as a means of implementing economic adjustments (Erne 2015; Heyes and Lewis 2015). This came to be most strongly exercised in countries that had been hit hard by the economic downturn, where the threat of, or actual, bailouts were used as leverage to impose austerity measures and structural reforms. In Slovenia, EU pressures triggered the reform of social security legislation that increased control over and imposed new (also work-related) conditions upon benefit claimants (Kobal-Tomc *et al.* 2015; Leskošek *et al.* 2008). European institutions also advocated flexicurity, a European version of workfare that imposed market discipline on the unemployed and whose implementation has, throughout Europe, resulted predominantly in greater flexibility and less security (Heyes 2011; Greer and Symon 2014). In Slovenia, these changes intensified the pressures on the labour force, increased the flexibilisation of work and brought the rise of precarious work and unemployment (Ignjatović 2010; Kanjuo-Mrčela and Ignjatović 2015). The rise of precarious work, unemployment and poverty levels increased demands for integral welfare spending, but Slovenia also had to maintain fiscal discipline and austerity measures. The result was that its welfare provision became increasingly malnourished and dependent upon external sources of funding, mainly on the European Social Fund (ESF), whose usage is conditioned upon the implementation of workfarist social policies (Samaluk 2017).

Keynesian welfare states used to provide strong employment and social protection that enabled both integration into work and wider social inclusion, but moves towards

workfare have increased the extent of precarity. To address the complex relation between employment and social protection, this chapter adopts Castel's (2003) conceptualisation of precarity as vulnerability and disaffiliation that hinders one's integration into work as well as inclusion in wider social networks. Castel's focus on vulnerability captures a transitional state between work and non-work statuses that are fundamentally shaped by changing welfare institutions. Precarity is thus not solely an issue of job quality, but is also about wider political and social developments that shape the work-citizenship nexus and connect labour politics to changing (supra)national politics (Lee and Kofman 2012). This suggests that precarious conditions should be assessed and tackled beyond the scale of the immediate workplace or the national labour market, and should include those who are moving between various work and non-work statuses and geographical and political boundaries. Through increasing demands on the unemployed to actively search for and take up any kind of work or the exclusion of migrants from social protection, work also becomes incorporated into everyday life that extends the exploitation of the workforce beyond the workplace. In this sense, 'precarity means imposing restrictions on the rights for participation in the established national compromise' (Tsianos and Papadopoulos 2006: 9). In the Slovenian context, this socio-economic restructuring had particularly negative effects on the (lower) middle class, the young, lower-skilled, old, long-term unemployed and migrant workers (Kobal-Tomc *et al.* 2015; Medica *et al.* 2011; UMAR 2013). The current crisis, which hinders participation in the established yet shrinking welfare state thus also poses challenges for the representation of the growing number of precarious workers and 'non-deserving' (non)citizens, who have been excluded from the labour market and broader social and rights systems.

The massive disillusionment that followed Slovenia's accession to the EU and the EMU also resulted in de-unionisation. Alongside gradual union decline – trade union density dropped from 43.7 per cent in 2003 to 26.6 per cent in 2008 – the membership structure has been changing. The latter process was marked by a growing share of unionisation being taken by the public sector and the increased levels of interest fragmentation between and within union confederations (Stanojević and Broder 2012). Today, there are seven representative trade union confederations in Slovenia, in addition to 47 trade unions that are representative for individual sectors or professions (MDDSZEM 2016). Despite the de-unionisation trends, trade unions still possess a high mobilising power; through tripartite social dialogue they also play an important role in easing the effects of the economic crisis and austerity.

In 2009, a series of unsuccessful local privatisations that deepened the crisis resulted in a spontaneous wave of strikes, culminating in a massive rally organised by the major confederations at the end of that year. The government reacted by opting for a 23 per cent increase in the minimum wage and providing interim support for companies and redundant workers, which was to serve as an exchange with trade unions for major structural reforms aimed at reforming the labour market and the pension system (Stanojević and Klarič 2013). The unions found this exchange unacceptable, but the government insisted on pushing through the reforms. Together with other affected actors mentioned below, unions started articulating dissatisfaction with the proposed

reforms and using their mobilising power. Part of the restructuring process was that the government wanted to limit students' income, abolish student work and replace it with German-tailored 'mini-jobs' accessible to students, pensioners and the unemployed (Stanojević and Klarič 2013). This was opposed by the Student Organisation of Slovenia and resulted in major protests in May 2010 (Strniša 2010). Trade unions assisted by gathering signatures against the government's reform proposal, triggering a referendum on 'mini-jobs' that prevented the enforcement of the proposed law. This was followed by a referendum concerning reforms of the pension system and the informal economy that further disabled the government's plans for structural reform and finally forced the cabinet to step down (Stanojević and Klarič 2013). These two instances of mobilisation and further political actions linked the emerging movements, student organisers and trade unions and became important drivers for innovation in the organisation of precarious workers and wider social groups, presented later in this chapter.

In 2011, the centre-left coalition was replaced by a centre-right government that announced even more radical austerity measures affecting social and labour market policies. Using the Troika as a threat, it was able to extract far-reaching concessions from trade unions. The planned 15 per cent linear wage cut for all employees in the public sector resulted in one of the biggest general strikes in the public sector, organised by trade unions in April 2012. This was followed by long negotiations that succeeded in limiting the extent of the government's interference in social rights. In addition, salaries were agreed to be linearly decreased by 8 rather than 15 per cent (Stanojević and Klarič 2013).

Through social dialogue, trade unions also participated in changes to the legal regulation of precarious work. An outcome of the bargaining process was the 2013 labour market reform which instituted several protective mechanisms (STA 2013). The protection of those in atypical employment was combined with the flexibilisation of regular contracts, which indicates that the bargaining process involved a balancing of the interests of both groups of workers. It is too early to assess the effects of the reform, although some evidence suggest that it has brought mixed results. The number of those in regular employment has increased faster than those on fixed-term jobs but, at the same time, the share of self-employment and the incidence of other work arrangements has sharply increased (UMAR 2014). In 2015, trade unions also succeeded in their attempts to redefine the minimum wage, which now brings minimum wage earners bonuses for night, Sunday and holiday shifts (Belovič 2015).

In the public sector, a result of the bargaining process was government agreement in September 2015 to increase the holiday allowance and release the decreased pay scales and restrictions on promotional pay increases as of 2016 (UL 2015). Negotiations on other austerity measures, mainly regarding the limited recourse, additional collective pension insurance and performance pay have continued since early 2016 but are not yet finalised because the negotiating sides have had problems in reaching a compromise (SVIZ 2016). This led to the unilateral interruption of negotiations by the government, but talks were reinstated as a result of the protests staged by public sector trade unions in June 2016 (SDVIRDS 2016). The bargaining process did bring some concessions,

but restrictions on recruitment in the public sector still apply, which has particularly negative effects on young and precarious workers.

The crisis has had a heavy impact on the young, most of whom are employed on various types of fixed-term contracts and/or performing other forms of work such as student work, self-employment, or employment under civil law-based contracts or through internships or active labour market policy (ALMP) schemes (Kanjuo-Mrčela and Ignjatović 2015). With on-going austerity measures, temporary ALMP schemes are also increasingly becoming a substitute for permanent employment and thus increase, rather than decrease, the domain of precarious work (Kanjuo-Mrčela and Ignjatović 2015; Samaluk 2017).

In this regard, precarity is, in fact, part of a rescaled state development strategy that is shaped by historical trajectories and countries' places in the global economy (Lee and Kofman 2012). In many CEE countries, this path relies heavily on low-cost precarious employment and drives intra-EU labour migration from east to west (Stan and Erne 2014). This is now, to a growing extent, being followed by Slovenia, whose worsened socioeconomic conditions have resulted in increased emigration among groups that were previously not prone to leaving the country (Samaluk 2016b). Moreover, the financial crisis has also brought about a chain of bankruptcies within the construction sector, which heavily relied on migrant workers, mainly from former Yugoslav republics. These were greatly exploited and, once the bankruptcies occurred, first targeted for dismissal and often deported without compensation (Medica *et al.* 2011). The number of migrant workers shrank in 2014 to one-third of that in 2010, but the construction industry still plays a leading role in the employment of migrant workers, many of whom have nowadays become posted workers, mainly to Germany or Austria (ZRSZ 2016; SDGD 2015).

The young, who experience difficulties transiting into the labour market and who circle between various work and non-work statuses, and migrant workers, who face problems with various border regimes and unfamiliar social, cultural and labour market settings, have largely lacked adequate representation from the traditional trade union movement. Unions seem relatively comfortable in addressing precarious work within a familiar political and geographic scale, but they are much more rigid in addressing the problems of the process of rescaling that has re-constituted the politics of labour market governance in Slovenia, the relations among various actors and class politics. Mobilisation and resistance in such a context calls for more Polanyian types of alliances that are not based solely upon class struggles but forged amongst communities facing the commodification of social existence (Burawoy 2008). This also demands a move beyond traditional trade union instruments, such as collective bargaining and national level social dialogue. Trade unions' renewal and, more broadly, their capacity to innovate thus depend on their capacity to address transnational politics, forge wider (trans)national alliances and shape socio-economic developments in line with worker/(non)citizens' interests (Erne *et al.* 2015; Erne 2015). This rescaled context thus serves as a point of departure upon which trade union innovation will be measured and assessed, and determines the selection of the presented case studies. The remainder of

this chapter explores the innovative approaches that address these challenges within and in association with the Association of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia (ZSSS), the country's largest trade union confederation.

## **2. Trade union innovation: case studies linked to ZSSS**

ZSSS comprises 23 trade unions mainly from the private, but also the public, sector. It is a relatively centralised organisation, with strong influence on the part of the confederation's leaders and the leaders of its main affiliates. The central organisation regularly participates in the work of the ESC and is thus systematically involved in interactions with the other social partners and in the public policy formulation process. ZSSS was contemplating the creation of a separate union for the self-employed but, thus far, only some of the existing unions have sought to organise certain groups of self-employed workers in precarious positions, such as taxi drivers, newspaper carriers and cultural workers. Given that these initiatives have been undertaken within the traditional scale of the workplace/sector, and through the use of traditional mechanisms, this chapter does not examine them in detail. Instead, it focuses on three initiatives that have emerged during the crisis within or in close relation to the confederation and that have brought important innovations in terms of the rescaling of trade union activities: they have involved diverse target groups and led to the creation of innovative organisational structures and the use of non-traditional mechanisms to address rescaled class politics and the politics of labour market governance. These initiatives are the Counselling Office for Migrants project and the trade union Young Plus, which have operated under ZSSS; and the Movement for Decent Work and Welfare Society, which cooperates closely with these two initiatives and ZSSS. The findings presented below are based upon the analysis of documents, websites and seven in-depth interviews with trade union activists.

### **2.1 The Counselling Office for Migrants**

The Counselling Office for Migrants (in short, the Migration Office) initially started out as a project within ZSSS at the beginning of the crisis. It was a response to the collapse of the construction sector, which relied heavily on migrant workers who were the first targeted for dismissal. At least within the major construction firms, trade unions did represent migrant workers (Grah 2016). Following the crisis, however, these migrants became hard to organise and were in need of specific assistance: due to the loss of employment, they faced various other problems related to their migration, social and housing status. In other words, their problems have rescaled beyond the labour market and these called for innovative responses that traditional unions lacked.

The key driver that brought this innovative project came from a committed new-generation trade unionist who had not yet been 'tamed' by a rigid organisational structure and culture:



‘When you are a newcomer, the best thing is that you are unfamiliar with the structure and you have no idea that you are breaking the rules... Later on I found out: “What is this one doing visiting [single] homes?!” Then this culture tames you, it guides your way of thinking...you start to self-censor.’ (interview Migration Office 2015)

In order to reach migrant workers, the interviewed activist used a proactive fieldwork approach that resembled the tactics of social movements, such as visiting sites where migrants resided. This has been successfully utilised by trade unions also to organise migrant workers in other contexts (Wills 2005). By so doing, he acted as a ‘bridge builder’ (Greer *et al.* 2007) between trade unions, social movements and non-governmental organisations (NGO) that were already empowering migrants. This resulted in the formation of strategic coalitions with various organisations that were further strengthened by external factors. Of particular importance in this regard was external funding from the ESF, which determined the Migration Office’s project form of organising and led to various (trans)national project-based coalitions with NGOs, public bodies and trade unions in other countries. External funding and coalition-building, in turn, enabled the rescaling of their services in terms of regional and transnational cooperation and the provision of services to various migrant groups affected by changing structural conditions.

The first project, run in coalition with Slovene Philanthropy, an NGO, was launched in 2010 and lasted until 2013. It focused mainly on migrant workers from former Yugoslav republics who used to be employed in the construction sector. The crisis led to a collapse in the domestic construction sector, which resulted in many migrant workers being posted by their companies to work abroad. To address the specific concerns of migrant posted workers, the Migration Office launched cooperation with the German trade union confederation, the DGB, and, in 2013, became part of its Fair Mobility Network project. In the same year, the Office was also contracted by the Employment Office’s Info Point for Foreigners to provide services related to empowerment and advocacy against the exploitation of migrants. At that point, the Office’s focus shifted towards undocumented migrants, migrant workers within transnational transport, posted workers, female migrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers. Focusing on these complex and diverse social groups required a rescaling of the Office’s service-oriented instruments beyond the labour market to a wider social area linked to migrant workers’ complex legal and social statuses:

‘There is a priority with regards to labour market issues but, because these issues bring other problems, such as legal status, problems with health insurance, problems of family members, problems with schooling, the recognition of qualifications, it turns out that we cover the whole spectrum of needs of an individual...We are very open and offer them these services.’ (interview Migration Office 2015)

In many respects, the Office’s work resembles radical social work that focuses on the structural roots of users’ problems and challenges the oppression they experience. Consequently, some activists also tend to refer to their target groups as users of trade

union/social care services. Their focus on different groups of migrants required the launch of innovative service-oriented instruments grounded within identity and rescaled class politics. This proactive approach was further strengthened through the employment of migrant workers themselves, who had suitable language skills and were familiar with the sites where migrants resided, gathered or worked. This enabled the Office to map the locations of dismissed and hard-to-reach migrant workers throughout Slovenia. Such an approach effectively overcomes the dichotomy between the workplace and migration issues, is able to detect discrimination beyond the workplace and thus offers an important innovation to traditional union approaches that impede the involvement of diverse social groups and marginalised workers in unions (Alberti *et al.* 2013; Wills 2008).

With the aim of empowering migrants and acquainting them with the Slovenian legislation, institutions, rights and other assistance points, as well as the possible violations to which they might be exposed, the Migration Office prepared various and multi-lingual publications tailored to specific migrant groups such as migrant workers, posted workers, refugees and asylum seekers (COM 2015a); in 2014-15, the Office's activists also organised three information workshops for 50 refugees. Working with various linguistic groups who often also lack English language skills, they used simultaneous translation through illustrations. This innovative technique enabled the interactive visual presentation of the communicated content, accompanied by verbal English language translation. To increase the spread of information amongst migrants, visual presentations were later disseminated through participants' Facebook profiles. Innovative media-oriented instruments in the form of social media sites are also used to reach migrant workers who are constantly on the move in the international road transport sector. The Office accordingly designed a Facebook page aimed at providing information for truck drivers, which currently has 893 members. All in all, through innovative methods the Office has rescaled its fieldwork with the use of social media sites that are becoming important intermediaries in migrant worker-oriented strategies, enabling the latter to gain and share information about local institutions and practices within a foreign market (Samaluk 2016a).

In its advocacy work, the Office has cooperated on a daily basis with employers, public institutions and other organisations, particularly with watchdogs and law enforcement bodies, to whom it reported 160 cases of the violation of employment, tax, criminal and other legislation in 2014-15. In many cases, it also provided or assisted migrants in obtaining evidence and information about these violations and thus became indirectly involved in legal and administrative procedures.

Parallel to its country-level activities, the Office's long-standing cooperation with DGB through the Fair Mobility Network increased its capacities to service posted workers on a transnational scale:

[The Fair Mobility] project was an exception, because it aimed at creating a network, info points; therefore not only dissemination, promotion, the average frame of reference of the European Commission. [It was] very concrete (...). We succeeded in that together with DGB...There is no other trade union on a transnational level



so connected on a daily basis. I call their coordinator: ‘Sort this out for that worker.’ The lawsuits go on in Germany and others regarding social issues in Slovenia... All this arose from need and the needs are great.’ (interview Migration Office 2015).

The transnational network with DGB thus provided indispensable services to posted workers on a daily basis and brought positive results insofar as more than one hundred exploited workers received their unpaid wages. Other cases went to court and there the Office assisted in the gathering of documentation and information that eventually led to successful outcomes in these proceedings. With the aim of enabling better protection for posted workers, the Migration Office’s activists participated in workshops and a conference organised by DGB in Germany; they also joined the protest of a group of exploited workers in Munich (COM 2015a). Run simultaneously in two countries, this innovative form of cooperation could be regarded as a step towards the practical implementation of transnational industrial citizenship (Greer *et al.* 2012). This transnational cooperation is currently under threat, however, because of the unsustainable level of project financing both within Slovenian and the German trade unions. Nevertheless, similar schemes are being set up with organisations from other countries. Austria is the second biggest market for posted workers from Slovenia, so the Migration Office has already held a meeting with Austrian trade unions and other important actors there with the aim of establishing cross-border contacts (COM 2015a). In addition, in late 2015 the Office signed an agreement of coordination between transport sector trade unions in central and south-eastern Europe, guaranteeing their members equal protection in Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia (COM 2015b). The Office also aims to extend this accord to trade unions in Austria, Bulgaria, Montenegro and other countries.

All in all, the Migration Office thus exposes and fights the systemic flaws that enable unscrupulous employers and intermediaries to exploit migrant labour and thus benchmarks employment and social standards for various groups of migrants. Being part of ZSSS also enables it to use the traditional social dialogue institutions to influence legislative changes in this area, especially since one of the Office’s activists has been elected a member of the National Council for the Inclusion of Aliens (COM 2015a). To push forward its proposals with regard to changes in employment, social and migration-related legislation, it has formed informal political alliances, mainly with the United Left. With its rich fieldwork experience and advocacy work, the Office has provided important arguments that have influenced changes in the Aliens Act and the proposed Act of Employment, Self-employment and the Work of Aliens, which would lead to the better protection of migrants and migrant workers. Finally, it has organised training for lawyers and new activists/volunteers and, in the future, it also plans to provide training for public institutions. With this aim in sight, it organised an international conference ‘Migration advocacy: between past and present’ in June 2015, which brought together national and international organisations and institutions that deal with migration issues (COM 2015a).

During the five years of the Office’s existence, its activists have become renowned experts on (labour) migration and are, in this regard, continually invited as speakers at public events, workshops and training courses organised by various institutions. They have

been approached by mass media and documentary film-makers and recognised as an example of good practice by the ETUC (COM 2015a). Nevertheless, this recognition is more felt from the outside of the confederation than from the inside. With the exception of trade unions that benefit from increased migrant workers' membership, and which refer to them any migrant workers with complex problems, my interviewees did not feel appreciated by the confederation. They have brought hundreds of new members to the existing branch unions, mainly in construction, metalwork and transport, but this was insufficient for the Office's self-financing. Due to the fact that Migration Office is still not being seen as providing a sufficient amount of traditional trade union 'currency' in the form of membership, there is a feeling within the Office that their work is sometimes 'perceived as nuisance' (interview Migration Office 2015). At the time of the interviews, a feeling of frustration dominated within the whole Office team due to the lack of internal recognition and of any new external funding being in sight after the end of 2015. Ultimately, the Office re-established itself in January 2016 as a civil society organisation outside ZSSS. This shifts its work entirely towards direct advocacy and empowerment and makes it eligible to apply for external funding not traditionally available to trade unions. However, it still has its office within the ZSSS building and continues to cooperate with it. At the same time, it has started cooperating more closely with trade unions beyond ZSSS, and one of them – the Education, Science and Culture Trade Union of Slovenia (SVIZ) – has granted it a considerable financial donation. Apart from external funding and donations, the Office also relies on its own resources provided by membership fees, and on the devoted work of activists.

## 2.2 The trade union Young Plus

The trade union Young Plus operates as an independent union within the auspices of ZSSS. It does not only represent the young, but also the 'young plus' – activists and those who are unable to become economically and socially independent adults regardless of their age due to their precarious condition. The creation of the union was driven by a combination of external and internal factors. Internally, it was initially supported by the same new generation trade unionist who launched the Migration Office project. This came in the form of assistance provided to young activists in the preparation of a media campaign against 'mini jobs' and the actual collection of signatures for the previously-mentioned referendum on the issue in early 2011 (ZSSS 2011a; 2011d). Young Plus was subsequently set up in November of the same year (ZSSS 2011c).

The initiative is innovative as it targets wider social groups that are constantly in transition from student to various temporary work or non-work statuses. Unlike traditional forms of union representation of the young, which are normally set up as committees within established unions, Young Plus operates as an independent legal entity within the Free Trade Union (SSS). This was procedurally the easiest way to become part of ZSSS and, at the same time, maintain independent status. Being part of ZSSS brings many advantages: the confederation provides them with office space and accounting services, as well as access to the traditional social dialogue institutions. In the latter sphere, there is an agreement that Young Plus can represent the confederation

in the ESC, the country's tripartite body, during meetings on young and precarious workers. At the same time, this innovative organisational form enabled it to gain the status of a youth organisation, which granted it access to other institutions, such as the Government Youth Council. This makes Young Plus a unique and powerful organisation that has access to the tripartite social dialogue institutions on the one hand and, on the other, to other institutions linked to youth politics. Its organisational structure is thus complementary to more traditional Fordist modes of tripartism and it is, with its focus on specific target groups and the rescaled agenda of citizen-workers' rights, transforming both traditional social dialogue institutions and traditional youth organisations. The activists themselves have observed, however, that this also creates conflicts and might create problems for the traditional social dialogue institutions in the future:

'Slowly a conflict is emerging within the ESC, while many organisations, especially youth organisations, demand that ESC should include also other groups, not just workers, employers and the government, but also youth representatives' (interview Young Plus 2015).

Together with the confederation, the union has, thus far, managed to fight off these pressures by shifting the responsibility to the government and employers to include their own youth representatives on specific topics.

Young Plus's innovative organisational form also rescales its access to external funds not traditionally applicable to social partnership institutions. It is eligible, as a recognised youth organisation, for tenders staged by the public Bureau for Youth; it is also able to apply for smaller projects within the framework of the Erasmus Plus tenders. Moreover, this delivers internal independence and helps avoid problems with internal competition, which it has experienced when applying for large-scale grants through ZSSS. It can also independently set its agenda and voice opinions, which allows it gradually to build a position as specialised experts within and outside ZSSS. On the other hand, a dependence on project financing and an inability to independently apply for large-scale grants, combined with activists' own precarious situation, imperils the sustainability of this innovative form of union organising. In this regard, interviewees expressed a need for stronger internal support that would allow them to professionalise their activity so that they do not need to depend upon voluntary work and unsustainable project funds.

Their own precarious situation and a unique focus on 'young plus' also guides their service provision orientation and their strategy to reach their target group:

'We wanted to reach the young but, at the beginning, we were too trade union-like for the young to accept us. On the other hand, we were too much for the young for trade unionists to accept us. We needed three years to profile ourselves. If you have to constantly volunteer, you can offer services that are available within the team, but you have to offer them [i.e. the young] something... the young perceive the membership fee as a payment for services. Basically, they pay the membership fee, once you give them something in return' (interview Young Plus 2015).

Young Plus's servicing model, as indicated in the above quote, arises from their limited resources and their attempts to reach a target audience who have grown up within the service economy and who perceive membership fees as payments for direct services. Only 5–10 per cent of their members pay fees and, therefore, the organisation finances its activity mainly through voluntary work and external project funds. Its service orientation resembles ALMP provision for the young that includes individual career and legal advice, advice regarding study, internships, employment abroad and tax advice (Plan dela sindikat Mladi plus 2015). Such a servicing model resembles business unionism insofar as it does not challenge the contemporary capitalist system but operates within it, although Young Plus's advocacy work moves beyond that, seeking to address the issues of precarity within the rescaled governance. In this regard, it employs political instruments and is involved in rescaled advocacy work with regard to Erasmus scholarships, internships and the Youth Guarantee that are all linked to EU policies and funding. Young Plus activists, as members of the Government Youth Council, lobbied the ministries to put the Youth Guarantee on their agendas, vote for it at EU level and define Slovenia's eligibility for it:

'In 2012 the ministries were convinced that youth unemployment was not a problem and then youth organisations, many of us, got together to raise awareness about this problem. We wrote to the ministries and to the EU that we support the Youth Guarantee... and then Slovenia voted for it... Later on, it turned out that Slovenia can lobby to become eligible for this funding... This is how the process for the development of the Youth Guarantee scheme started and youth organisations were included from the start till the end... When I talk to youth organisations or trade unions in other countries, the young were not included in this process. In Slovenia, we fought to gain this position and we are being consulted' (interview Young Plus 2015).

The consequence of Young Plus's efforts was that the eastern region of Slovenia became eligible for Youth Guarantee ESF funds. In addition, the organisation participated in the development of Youth Guarantee policy, as well as in the workings of the Committee responsible for evaluating its implementation. It has thus actively influenced the rescaled social and labour market governance and thus provides an example of an innovative means of exercising EU citizenship rights. On the other hand, however, its own evaluation of the Youth Guarantee (Young Plus 2015) shows that the ALMP measures adopted do not grant young people permanent inclusion in the labour market and thus act more as a subsidy for growing precarity.

The union's advocacy work is very visible in the area of internships and in the public sector, especially with regard to social care and education, where austerity measures have done away with state-funded subsidies and exit routes for interns into permanent jobs. In order to expose these problems, Young Plus has forged alliances with professional bodies, public sector trade unions and student organisations (SVIZ 2015). It tries to reach and organise its target audience through public engagement during major student and other events, as well as through mobilisation. For instance, it supported students and young social work graduates in organising a protest in May 2015 that called for sustainable state funding and employment for interns (Kosmač 2015). Its overall efforts

brought victories in terms of achieving the dismissal of an ineffective populist and non-systemic legal proposal against unpaid internships, and forcing the government to take a more serious approach through the publication of an intergovernmental analysis of internships and the actual allocation of funds, but problems with the labour market integration of young people still remain. The major problem in this regard is the continuation of the austerity measures that restrict new recruitment in the public sector. The requirement for the latter is then substituted through various temporary ALMP schemes funded by the ESF that push workers into circular mobility, in place of enabling their permanent integration into the labour market and their upwards professional mobility (Samaluk 2017).

Young Plus is very innovative in the use of communication tools through which it tries to reach its transient target groups and also employ political instruments. It has a website that it frequently updates in order to inform members about their rights and the legislative and other changes relevant to them, publicise its services, seek political engagement and create political pressure:

‘On our webpage we provide a monthly oversight of what is happening... We try to be very prompt in updating the information. With that, we also create pressure; because it becomes visible that we are doing the work of others, that they [the government] do not meet the set deadlines... to prepare some systemic solutions’ (interview Young Plus 2015).

Apart from the website, Young Plus is also very innovative in the use of social media. It has around 700 followers on Twitter and another 1 500 on Facebook; at the same time, social media grants it easier access to ministers and journalists. The union’s activists are also occasionally hired by the confederation, either through ALMP schemes or through individual contracts, for the provision of services related to their target groups or the provision of media and communications support on specific issues or projects. With a more substantial financial commitment on the part of the confederation, Young Plus’s expertise in this area could also help change the public image of ZSSS and its traditional communications strategies. In any case, the appearance of Young Plus activists in mass and social media alters the image of traditional union representatives: it shifts away from the stereotypical older male union representative towards the greater participation of young and female activists, making unions appear more welcoming and open to young women.

### 2.3 The Movement for Decent Work and Welfare Society

The Movement for Decent Work and Welfare Society is a civil society organisation that cooperates closely with ZSSS. It tries to put the emerging problems of growing precarity on the public and political agenda and to disseminate benchmarks on decent work and welfare within Slovenian society. Initially, the Movement emerged as a result of the coordinating campaigns between ZSSS and the Student Organisation of Slovenia on the referendum on ‘mini-jobs’ and pension reform (ZSSS 2011b). The establishment of the Movement was, as with the other two initiatives examined in this chapter, also linked to

the dedicated work of one activist in particular, who successfully brought together and coordinated the growing number of people who are now active in the movement and who take responsibilities for particular tasks. Their organisation is not part of ZSSS, but they have gained the confederation's trust by cooperating with it during the above-mentioned mobilising drives. ZSSS supports the Movement by offering it office space at a discounted rent and free use of other areas within the ZSSS building. Moreover, the Movement's presence in the building provides it with immediate access to all ZSSS staff and branch unions, with whom they have built good relations over the years and who act as an important source of information and as occasional partners:

'We established ourselves in 2012 once we moved in to the building of ZSSS. We discovered that if we want to be informed about the things we do, we need to be within the environment where things are happening' (interview Movement 2015).

The Movement is legally organised as a civil society organisation, which enables it to apply for project funds and to receive donations, but most of its activities entails the voluntary work of activists who are themselves precarious workers or students. Consequently, its internal structure is very informal, non-hierarchical and open to all who want to participate:

'We use our legal status because we need to have one in order to apply for projects, to receive donations. But we operate more as an informal movement. This is due to very practical reasons because we always invite all activists, regardless of their function, activity or whether they have paid the membership fee... When someone wants to become active, (s)he is equal to everyone; when one wants to leave, one leaves...' (interview Movement 2015).

The Movement's inclusive approach, going beyond its membership base, is useful in activating people with diverse interests, but it also requires a lot of coordination and motivation of people, which is mainly achieved through the committed work of a small number of activists. The majority of its members are not from Ljubljana; therefore, they also have strong links to other regions in Slovenia. These regional links could have been further strengthened by an increase in the financial capacity required to support regional projects. Moreover, it is also trying to build a transnational network of organisations that deal with precarious work. So far, it has attracted foreign volunteers through the European Voluntary Service scheme and organised a two-day workshop 'Global jobs challenge: tendencies and solutions', to which it invited organisations with similar interests from other European countries. It lacks the traditional international contact channels otherwise available to trade union movements or student organisations and thus it continues to look for suitable partners across Europe.

The Movement's membership base is similar to that of Young Plus and includes students, young precarious workers and the unemployed; however, it does not focus on servicing the 'young plus' and influencing ALMPs targeted at young people, but rather on building and disseminating benchmarks on decent work and welfare within society and addressing the broader systemic issues of precarious work and the shrinking welfare state. Its greatest achievement so far has been to bring the issue of precarious work into



the public discourse and get it on the political agenda. The aim is to gain and broaden understanding of the growing precarity and to bring together the diverse workers and social groups that are affected by it.

The Movement's activities include various forms of public engagement, campaigning and innovative use of media. Its founding conference on precarious work in 2013 was followed by a campaign 'Faces of precarious work' (MDWWS 2015), which gave a human face and a story to a concept which was then not publicly known and fairly abstract. A part of the campaign was to create a website and an information brochure in order to raise public awareness of the problems of precarious work and to inform precarious workers and citizens about their rights and empower them. To engage the public, they also used innovative methods inspired by Augusto Boal's (1979) method of the theatre of the oppressed. In this regard, they developed an interactive theatre play 'Performed work' (UVK 2015), which exposes the problems faced by precarious workers and engages the audience in finding solutions. The play was performed many times in 2015 in various cities in Slovenia. The Movement also organises an annual conference on precarious work and a summer camp, where they invite expert speakers and hold special sessions to inform precarious workers of their rights. In cooperation with researchers and activists, they organise monthly workshops addressing different aspects of precarity, and many other individual meetings and reading groups, with the aim of expanding their own understanding of the problem as well as that of the wider public.

The Movement's public engagement and innovative projects quickly gained it public recognition and opened the doors to the mass media: its activists are often invited as expert speakers at various events or media talk shows on the topic of precarious work. Even more importantly, it also gave activists the credibility with which to engage political instruments; specifically, it enabled them to launch lobbying activities and demand that the government takes more seriously the problems related to precarious work, with great success in the latter case via the formation of a government task group on precarious work. This was initiated through a public consultation on precarious forms of work in May 2015, which brought together the government, trade unions, activists, journalists and researchers. In this respect, the Movement has played an important mediating and gatekeeping role between the government and other interested organisations.

The Movement remains outside traditional social dialogue institutions, but it is able successfully to lobby the government. If embraced and supported by trade unions, it could also become an important element of the future revitalisation of the Slovenian trade union movement. The Movement had, for some time, attempted to create a separate union of precarious workers within ZSSS and, in October 2016, did indeed establish a Trade Union of the Precarious (Sindikata prekarcev). Unlike the Movement's focus on activism and wider advocacy, the trade union aims to provide direct services and support to precarious workers. Its main target is the increasing group of self-employed workers and, since its establishment, it has already been approached by self-employed translators, taxi drivers, architects and agency workers. Its organisational form is very similar to that of Young Plus: it also operates as an independent union within SSS and sees itself as a 'bridge between the Movement and Young Plus' (interview Movement

2015). Therefore, they do not crowd out each other's activities, but complement each other's work by offering services to different target groups and through mutual cooperation and support. In this regard, they have concluded an informal agreement and Young Plus also appoints one of the members of the Union's steering committee. Both trade unions thus represent an innovation compared to traditional trade unions but, apart from declarative support, they receive little material assistance from the confederation. All in all, there are frustrations within all the presented initiatives stemming from the limited support they receive from the confederation. It therefore seems that greater involvement from ZSSS would allow them to professionalise their activities and boost their capacities.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

This chapter has argued that post-crisis Slovenia has experienced major changes shaped through the process of rescaling, in which local social and labour market policies, politics and relations became (trans)nationally guided, affecting wider social groups at various scales way beyond the immediate workplace, sector, or the national labour market. These structural changes resulted, on one hand, in de-unionisation and interest fragmentation but, on the other, they have brought innovative forms of organising of increasingly precarious and non-unionised workers and (non)citizens. By focusing on case studies within and in association with the largest trade union confederation, ZSSS, this chapter explored three initiatives – the project of the Migration Office; the trade union Young Plus; and the Movement for Decent Work and Welfare Society.

The case studies show that the launch of the three initiatives was driven primarily by the deterioration in employment and social standards and by breaches of employees' rights that have become particularly pronounced and widespread since the economic crisis. At the same time, none of the initiatives could have developed without external project funding and the dedicated work of a handful of leading activists who were the driving force for their establishment and growth. This poses the threat of a personification of such projects, but closer exploration of the initiatives shows that, with their development and enhanced activist base, personification begins to fade away both within the very organisations and in their public image. Nevertheless, their limited human resources, constant fight for survival and often very personal stakes and involvement in the issues they address do demand many personal sacrifices. These factors in combination have translated into innovative organising tactics and the formation of new organisational forms and strategic alliances with wider social actors, groups and movements that have addressed the problems of rescaling.

All the initiatives presented in this chapter are innovative in terms of the selection of their target audience. They focus upon the wider social groups facing precarity not only because of their deteriorating employment standards and compromised rights but also because of their limited access to wider social and political rights. In this regard, the Migration Office represents different migrant groups, whereas Young Plus stands for the young, precarious workers, users of ALMP schemes or the unemployed and all those who cannot become economically independent adults due to their precarious situation.

The Movement's focus, by contrast, is not grounded within identity politics but upon its attempts to understand precarity in all its emerging forms, which could become a sort of radical consciousness for mobilising various precarious groups and for developing and disseminating benchmarks for decent work and welfare society. Moreover, the recent establishment of the Trade Union of the Precarious, which focuses on self-employed workers, aims to complement the work both of the Movement and of Young Plus.

The initiatives' shared focus on wider social groups required a rescaling of their activities beyond the workplace or the national labour market and radically different forms of organising. In this regard, servicing and empowering individual users, as well as advocacy work, are very proactive and combine social care, social justice and trade union approaches. This is reflected in the innovative choice of strategies and instruments used, as well as in the activist base who themselves belong to these wider precarious groups and who are, as such, better equipped to reach them. The three initiatives are particularly innovative with regard to their public engagement, communication strategies and media-oriented instruments that do not only serve as communication tools but also as political and mobilising instruments, as well as an extended and proactive fieldwork approach to reach constantly mobile and/or isolated workers. It is also noteworthy that these innovative strategies are pursued through coalitions with civil society actors, professional groups, trade unions and institutions on a (trans)national scale. They thus represent an important innovation to traditional union approaches and class politics that targets particular workplaces, sectors and the national labour market. In this regard, they alter the often-negative public image of trade unions, change the normative image of union representatives and make trade unions more welcoming to an increasingly diverse workforce and wider social groups. At the same time, through their rescaled class politics all the initiatives are influencing the rescaled citizenship agenda. Through transnational trade union cooperation, the Migration Office is innovative in terms of the practical implementation of transnational industrial citizenship. Young Plus is similarly innovative through its rescaled advocacy and lobbying work seeking to influence EU citizenship and its rescaled social dialogue agenda linked to EU governance concerning active labour market and social policies. Last, but not least, the Movement's attempts to build regional and transnational alliances could be important in strengthening civil society on a regional and (trans)national scale.

Migration Office, Young Plus and the newly-established Trade Union of the Precarious have all, as a part of ZSSS, had direct access to the traditional social dialogue institutions whereas the Movement's proximity and cooperation with ZSSS grants it indirect access. The result has been that these initiatives also have the potential of feeding into the confederation the rescaled agenda and the problems faced by precarious workers and (non)citizens, which can subsequently be addressed within traditional national and EU-level social dialogue institutions. Moreover, they bring typical trade union concerns with class struggle to other institutions. By doing that, they complement traditional trade union instruments that, if applied alone, are inadequate within the current rescaled context. They therefore benchmark employment and social standards and affect legislative and policy change not only in relation to precarious workers but also the wider social groups experiencing precarity.

In this respect, the Migration Office seems to be the most professional and effective, while Young Plus seems to have the most innovative organisational form: it is a unique and powerful youth organisation that, on the one hand, has access to tripartite social dialogue institutions and, on the other, to other institutions that deal with youth politics. At the same time, all organisations are able to set their own agenda independently and to access external funds not traditionally available to social partnership institutions. It seems that, currently, such an organisational structure is complementary to more traditional Fordist modes of tripartism: it does not seem to crowd out traditional trade union structures but rather supplements them; and at the same time, it has the potential to change both traditional social dialogue and civil society institutions.

The activists of Young Plus and the Movement have been struggling with their own precarious situation, their reliance on voluntary work and small scale projects, but the Migration Office has been able in the past to secure the temporary funds with which to professionalise its activity through coalition-building. This positive example notwithstanding, all the initiatives still have an insufficient membership base to finance their activities and are thus dependent upon unsustainable project funds. This shows that the project mode of work organisation, which was traditionally present only within the non-governmental sector, is not only spreading to the public sector (Samaluk 2017) but also to the protective institutions. Different projects can diversify trade union activities, but their temporary character also brings all the pitfalls of unsustainability that forces such initiatives to compete for available funds and which can thus decrease their ability to focus on their core social mission.

In order to avoid these dangers, ZSSS should give these innovative practices greater credibility by increasing their capacities and making their activist base less precarious, thus enabling a professionalisation of their activities. So far, support for the new activities within the confederation has been tentative and has come mainly from branch unions that have benefited from new membership and specialised service provision. The long-term attempts of the Movement and Young Plus to become fully included and supported by ZSSS, the equally tentative support offered to the newly-established Trade Union of the Precarious and the recent distancing of Migration Office from ZSSS indicates that the confederation is not yet prepared to sustain and institutionalise its own innovative projects. If supported and embraced by the traditional trade union movement, these innovative initiatives and the new forms of organising they bring could complement traditional trade union activities and their instruments. Traditional trade unions alone cannot face the contemporary challenges posed by global neoliberal restructuring and its attacks on the social, political and labour rights of transnationally mobile and precarious workers and (non)citizens. If trade union support remains declarative rather than real, however, there is a danger that these new forms of organising might start to crowd out traditional trade union institutions.

## Interviews

Interview with activists from the Counselling Office for Migrants (Migration Office) within the Association of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia (ZSSS), Ljubljana, 28 September 2015.

Interview with activists from the trade union Young Plus, Ljubljana, 15 June and 12 October 2015.

Interview with an activist from the Movement for Decent Work and Welfare Society (Movement), Ljubljana, 19 October 2015.

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