Preface and Acknowledgements

*Innovating European Labour Markets: Dynamics and Perspectives* highlights and traces the consequences of the increasing turmoil on the labour market resulting in more volatility and creating a rather diverse landscape of employment forms that will shape people’s life courses. The book particularly aims at discussing innovative labour market policy practices and perspectives with a view to changing working careers and life courses. The ‘best practices’ on life course policies presented in the book can be considered potential answers to the challenges and requirements labour market and employment systems are confronted with now and in the near future. This way the book’s focus on ‘innovation’ is understood as an adequate and effective, possibly even a proactive, response to these challenges and requirements. The carefully selected contributions in the volume deal with various dimensions and different levels of the flexibility–security nexus within the life course perspective. This not only concerns labour market policy at the national and the EU level but especially also at the firm and sector level. Innovating firms’ policies with respect to the creation of flexible working time options and to the elaboration of life-course-oriented human resource policies seem critical to respond successfully to the ongoing fundamental changes. The book hopefully contributes to raising our understanding of the driving factors that determine the performance of the dissimilar pathways in Europe with a view to their impact on the flexibility–security nexus over the life course.

The authors address issues as to how innovative policies are designed, how they are put to the test and why they became more or less successful in the various European contexts in improving the work–life balance, that is the balance of flexibility and security over the life course. These issues have become key now in the current European policy debate. The EU member states already since 2003 have endorsed the need to progress on policies aiming at improving the work–life balance and also accepted at the end of 2007 common principles of ‘flexicurity’ policies on which future policies in the member states should be vested.

OSA is a research institute that operates on the border of science and policy, conducting research dealing with issues considered of structural importance for policymaking as well as pure academic research. This volume also represents one of the results of the three year research programme ‘Flexicurity: A New Paradigm for Labour Market and Employment Regulation’, funded by the The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO). The book contains a selection of the papers that were presented in a first draft form at the closing conference of both research programmes, held in November 2006 at the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) building in Amsterdam.

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