Preface

This book goes to print some ten years after the Financial Crisis and the onset of what in some parts of the world was considered a Great Recession. In the years immediately after the advent of the crisis, intense debate continued about the impact of labour regulation on labour market outcomes. This happened in particular because many countries pursued austerity policies that involved not only fiscal measures but also changes to labour market regulation. The recipe was generally the same as that promoted by some academic and institutional sources for some years before the onset of the crisis, and derived from orthodox economics.

The impact and the prevalence of arguments for deregulatory policies for labour markets were in large part the impetus for the establishment of the Regulating for Decent Work (RDW) Network. The Network brings together scholars from different disciplinary perspectives, and from all parts of the globe, to examine the effects and the nature of labour regulation. A central RDW concept is that labour regulation, and the social world that it seeks to shape, are assumed to be both complex and unpredictable, with no necessary direct or linear impacts, relationships or phenomena. The contributions in this volume are very much in keeping with the assumptions, goals and methods of the RDW project. The contributions shed important light on the conceptual ambiguity that besets key aspects of debate about labour market regulation and its impact, most especially the complexity of the notions of formality and informality. They call into question how accurately we measure key phenomena and whether we have the data necessary to devise effective policy, whatever its orientation. They draw attention to the heuristic devices and social practices that lead either to exclusion or inclusion, as well as to the challenges of largely linking effective social protection to the standard employment relationship. In the broad, the chapters remind us that while the impact of labour regulation in practice may not be precisely known in advance, there remains nevertheless an essential role for carefully calibrated state (and private) labour regulation. This is particularly true for the groups who feature in many chapters of the book, and who are regularly among those most excluded from labour markets and from effective protection: migrants, women and younger workers, for many of whom work is informal and/or in agriculture.
The publication of the volume has taken time, but we are nevertheless confident of the continuing originality and relevance of the research and the arguments presented. In this respect, it bears remarking that in recent years we are perhaps able to detect some important shifts in the positions of key global actors and institutions towards perspectives on labour regulation that might be considered more consistent with the approaches presented here. We as editors are deeply grateful to the whole group of contributors for their patience and persistence in the project.

The patience and ongoing support of the ILO Publishing unit were also essential to the finalization of this project. We thank Chris Edgar, Alison Irvine and Charlotte Beauchamp for this, and for their continual good humour. We also owe a particular debt of gratitude to our co-publisher, Edward Elgar. At the ILO, both Raymond Torres and Moussa Oumarou gave us (jointly and severally, and at different times) the space to pursue the work required to publish this book. Our final thanks go to our colleague in the Labour Law and Reform Unit, Tvisha Shroff. Her role in the final months was as significant as it was effective. Her collegial and conscientious administrative, editorial and research assistance were essential in getting this book published.