

## Introduction

The papers in this special issue of *Schmollers Jahrbuch* were presented at the Fifth International Conference of German Socio-Economic Panel Users, held in Berlin on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> of July 2002. They are a selection of the 29 papers which were presented. Those 29 papers were chosen among 73 papers which were submitted for presentation at the conference. The speakers represented several fields of social science as well as many countries. Half the presenters came from outside Germany, and the participants ranged from as far afield as Australia, North America, Israel and the Russian Federation. The papers in this issue provide a flavor of the work being carried out by the four hundred research teams registered as users of the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP).

The most popular research topic at the conference was wage and income inequality and mobility. The themes of inequality and mobility are closely related, since mobility determines to what degree inequality at a point in time persists. Two papers applied new methods of measurement to the SOEP data. Gang and Yun apply a new decomposition technique to investigate the rise in wage inequality in eastern Germany. Van Kerm provides a new method which allows mobility in different parts of the income distribution to be assessed. He finds that in Germany individuals in the bottom 10% of the distribution are much more mobile than others. Gang, Landon-Lane and Yun compare wage mobility of men and women at different points in the wage distribution, and find that women are less upwardly mobile at high wages. Headey and Muffels analyze income mobility in three countries, Germany, the Netherlands and the United States, to test hypotheses about the nature of the welfare states in each country.

Three papers, written by scholars from three different disciplines, examine the determinants of new job-finding and unemployment duration. Wolff and Trübswetter study the early years of the eastern German transition to discover which individuals left their old job most quickly. They find that the skilled made the fastest transition to new jobs, and that short-time benefits slowed the process. Gangl finds that receipt of unemployment insurance increases post-unemployment earnings, while Gallo, Endrass, Bradley, Hell, and Kasl look at the importance of psychological factors in unemployment duration.

Williams and Ondrich, Spiess and Yang examine different aspects of wage determinants. Williams studies the self-employed, a group that is often ne-

glected, and finds that they have a low return to schooling. Ondrich et al. find that each month of maternity leave reduces a woman's subsequent wage by 1.5 %. In their papers, Riphahn and Serfling as well as Schraepler observe that estimated wage determinants could be affected not only by bias arising from attrition from the survey, but also by bias arising from individuals' not responding to the wage question. They study the correlates of non-response and emphasize the importance of distinguishing those who are unable to respond from those who refuse to respond.

Another group of papers revolves around the theme of changes in labor force or personal status and changes in income. Burkhauser, Giles, Lillard and Schwarze document the fall in real equivalent income experienced by women who become widowed. Zaidi, Frick and Buechel examine income dynamics among retired persons. Their work indicates that British retirees are much more likely to experience a large income fall. Drobníř assesses the influence of a man's wife and her income on his retirement decision.

A final group of papers exploits various features of the SOEP to examine other topics. Fuchs-Schuendeln and Schuendeln contrast the savings behavior of eastern and western Germans, and show theoretically how the transition in the east induced the different behaviors. Bonin, Kempe and Schneider estimate a structural model to simulate the effect of various wage subsidy schemes on employment. Hufnagel uses time-use data to compute the amount of time a child's parents spent caring for him and her, and relates this to the child's success at school. Kenkel, Lillard and Mathios compare smoking behavior over the life cycle across four countries.

Although this special edition's editors receive credit for the conference by having their names on the issue, the hard work of many others was also necessary to organize the conference and bring the special issue to fruition. Christine Kurka was responsible for the local organization together with Uta Rahmann, who also prepared the papers for the publisher. Floriane Weber, Andrea Schaefer, Sabine Kallwitz, and Gabi Freudenmann ensured that the conference went smoothly once underway.

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