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***Ethnic Diversity in European Labor Markets:  
Challenges and Solutions, by Martin Kahanec  
and Klaus F. Zimmermann.  
A Review.***

Donella Caspersz \*

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Managing ethnic diversity in labour forces is a common challenge throughout the world. This poses a special challenge in the European Union (EU) given the free flow of people between nation-states in the Union post integration of Member States under the EU umbrella. Hence the collection of country specific articles in the edited collection *Ethnic Diversity in European Labor Markets Challenges and Solutions* edited by Martin Kahanec and Klaus F. Zimmermann is a useful summary of information that can be drawn upon by those interested in this field in both informing and developing responses to the issue.

A major theme preoccupying most of the essays in this collection is however the continued exclusion of labour migrants from effective participation in the societies in the host countries to which they migrate for work. Whilst this is more dramatic in some as opposed to other countries (see for instance Tables 1.5 and 1.6 in the introductory essay by Kahanec and Zimmermann), the issue is as Kahanec and Zimmermann conclude, “[...] the data and definition issues cannot hide the worrisome reality of ethnic minorities in Europe” which they define as “the issue of integration of ethnic minorities into the whole social fabric” (25).

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\* DonellaCaspersz is a lecturer in the University of Western Australia Business School, in the Management and Organisations discipline.

The present review refers to Martin Kahanec and Klaus F. Zimmermann eds. *Ethnic Diversity in European Labor Markets: Challenges and Solutions*. Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, UK, 2011, 328 pp., ISBN 978 184844 559 8.

Whilst amply illustrated in the essays in this collection, signals of this uneasy accommodation between host nation societies and labour migrants are also evidenced by the absence of signatories to the European Convention on the Legal Status of Migrant Workers. Denmark, Hungary, Latvia, Romania and Slovakia are nation-states featured in this collection that have either not signed or ratified the treaty. This sends out a signal of dis-unification on a central issue and challenges the principle of unification symbolised by the formation of the Union.

The issue of social integration of labour migrants into host countries is indeed a matter that should preoccupy those engaged in migrant labour market considerations. International flows of labour migrants are ever increasing. Interestingly, whilst in the past this followed a South-North trajectory, the ILO notes the increasing phenomenon of labour migrants South-South and the propensity for nation-states such as Canada and other more developed economies, to be both sending and receiving labour migrants (2010). However the institutional structures and societal attitudes that characterise labour migrants as only another component of the production process rather than an integral aspect of nation-state societies, raise serious questions about the efficacy of these migrations in the long term. For instance, as the essays in this collection note, the precarious nature of their status makes labour migrants vulnerable to forced dislocations from host countries when local conditions change, and their continued employment status cannot be supported. Thus, as the ILO concludes in the face of this now permanent trend in labour force dynamics in nation-states in both Europe and elsewhere,

The challenge now confronting the global community is to govern and regulate migration in such a way that it can serve as a force for growth and development in both origin and destination countries, while protecting the rights of migrant workers<sup>1</sup>.

Thus, the detail provided to readers in the essays in this collection will undoubtedly be of assistance for those interested in exploring this matter further. In addition to statistical substantiation, the authors of the essays also provide insightful observations about the matters in their own local contexts that influence the status of labour migrants. The essays follow a format which reviews the status of ethnic minorities in local labour forces, with the chapters that subsequently consider the barriers and policy

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<sup>1</sup> International Labour Organisation, *International Labour Migration. A rights-based Approach*, ILO, Geneva, 2010.



responses by stakeholders including government and business. The chapters in the main conclude with reflective notes on ‘what else can be done?’

This attention to context is appreciated, as it is undoubtedly a deeper understanding of the local contexts that labour migrants enter that is needed in developing appropriate responses. That is, policy and regulation emerge in response to local situations. This is the dilemma facing management of ethnic diversity in labour forces: that is, whilst labour migration is a global phenomenon, resolution of the issues that prevent the ability of labour migrants to engage efficaciously in the societies they enter remains a locally driven challenge. The authors of the essays in this collection refer to this dilemma, noting the barriers preventing social integration that emerge from the attitudes of local societies. Without doubt the detail provided by the authors in this collection will be of assistance to those responding to this challenge.

The imperative to do so is high as labour migration and hence ethnic diversity in labour forces worldwide continues to deepen, given the increasing ‘push’ factors such as social unrest and unemployment in local environments that motivate labour migrants to move in search of new opportunities for them and their families. Coupled with push factors such as ageing populations and low birth rates in many societies around the world that underpins much of the need for labour migrants in host country environments; it is clear that managing the challenges and developing solutions to ethnic diversity not just in European labour markets but those in other regions of the world, will attain greater significance in the future.



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