

## Preface

The COVID-19 pandemic has touched people's lives in many ways. All readers of this volume certainly have a COVID-19-related story to tell, and the pandemic will undoubtedly become a marker that people will remember, like where they were and what they were doing during these long and uncertain months, particularly during the first wave. As editors, we also experienced some of these consequences – though luckily none were fatal. Paola had to combine her own work (home office) and her children's work (distance learning) during the various school closures in Austria, the first of which in the spring of 2020 turned out to be just the beginning of a series of sequels unfolding like a successful TV drama. Anne moved to the Lombardy province in Italy to join the European Commission Joint Research Center in March 2020, at a time when the infection and the fatality rates had reached their highest levels, particularly in the province of Bergamo. Hence, the containment measures imposed in that province were among the earliest and the most stringent in all of Europe. Guillaume, whose main affiliation is with the Asian Demographic Research Institute in Shanghai, faced several challenges, starting with being unable to travel back to China for many months. Then, when it became possible for him to do so, he was affected by the zero-COVID policy, which had him stranded in his room on the campus in Shanghai for weeks in 2022. Josh was able to travel to Austria in the summer of 2021, but when he arrived in Vienna, there were limited opportunities to organise face-to-face meetings, as the city was still in lockdown at the time. As a result, the four guest editors of this special issue could never all meet in person. At the same time, we are aware that our experiences are by no means exceptional, and that the outbreak of the pandemic has disrupted the rhythm of life as we had previously known it in every country and in every setting.

This volume has been completed almost three years after the beginning of the pandemic. There is little doubt that the crisis has changed the way research is carried out. During most of the pandemic we met online and were required to learn new methods of organisation and interaction. This was easier in highly digitalised contexts, which further underscores the contrast between higher- and lower-income countries. But even in resource-rich contexts, the pandemic was harder on researchers in unstable positions, and on those with pressing family commitments, mostly women.

Finally, we would like to thank all of the authors who submitted a manuscript to our journal; the colleagues who patiently and constructively reviewed the submissions; and the colleagues who contributed to the finalisation of this volume.

In particular, we would like to thank the managing editor, Maria Winkler-Dworak, and the editor-in-chief, Tomáš Sobotka, who never ceased to provide support, to make suggestions, and to offer assistance when needed. It has been a long journey, but we never lost our good spirit.

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Guest Editors