**Social Security Law in Small Jurisdictions**

Danny Pieters

**Reviewed by:** Jed Meers, Senior Lecturer in Law, University of York.

Whoever said “bigger is better” has clearly not explored the “world of small states” – a book series edited by Springer that explores the “unique challenges and opportunities that small states present”, but also their value to “understanding large state issues”. In a series that stretches from dispute resolution to international relations, Pieters’ latest book is its social security offering. In *Social Security Law in Small Jurisdictions,* he seeks to answer the following question: how is social security law impacted by the smallness of a jurisdiction?

In answering this question, the book moves between three modes: the conceptual, the descriptive and the practical. Pieters excels in the last two. The book provides a concise and user-friendly guide to twenty social security systems in the world’s small jurisdictions and makes twenty-one practical recommendations for small states seeking to respond to many of the unique challenges their social security systems face. Pieter’s comfort with moving from the analytical to specific policy suggestions and the concise writing style is perhaps unsurprising given his time as a senior Belgian politician and the 33rd President of the Belgian Senate. Its conceptual framing lacks some of this same clarity and execution. Although the book remains a user-friendly and practical introduction to the social security problems facing small jurisdictions, it offers more to readers looking to understand how these small states approach social security schemes and what practical lessons we can learn, than those readers looking to address broader questions about how small jurisdictions could unsettle some of our established ways of thinking about social security more fundamentally.

The book is in three parts. The first examines the organising concepts of both a “small jurisdiction” and “social security”. This is in the spirit of clarifying the book’s focus and approach to these terms, rather than anything in the way of a deeper conceptual exploration – nothing here will surprise readers. Indeed, as Pieters suggests when outlining his approach to small jurisdictions: “simply put: small jurisdictions are jurisdictions that are small” (pg. 3). Here, the book tethers its case studies to the definition of a “small state” offered by the World Bank: having a population of up to 1.5 million people (pg. 4). Having set out these two concepts, Part I then turns to an “excursion” into the phenomenon of “legal transplants”. This is, as is argued across this first part of the book, for two reasons. First, Pieters suggests that the smaller states may be more likely to “borrow” social security approaches from other states – because they lack the personnel and resources for bespoke solutions – or, in certain instances, may be reluctant to do so to assert the small state’s independence (especially where it may have been achieved as a result of conflict). Small jurisdictions are, Pieters suggests, a kind of “quasi-laboratory situation” for comparing the cost of a “legal transplant” to that of a “home grown” solution (pg. 13). The first part ends by identifying the “common features” uniting small jurisdictions “as far as social security is concerned”. Twelve are identified, from increased exposure to economic and environmental shocks, to the importance of migration and the need for strong ties with other states (pg. 15-39).

Part II moves to the “country studies”: twenty of them in total, each providing a concise, structured assessment of the social security in a small jurisdiction. The countries covered are: Aruba, Bhutan, Curaçao, Cyprus, the Faroe Islands, Fiji, Gibraltar, Greenland, Grenada, Guyana, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Maldives, Malta, San Marino, Seychelles, Sint Maarten, Suriname, Tonga, and Trinidad and Tobago. For each – in around 10 pages per country – Pieters uses the same headings to outline the basic shape of the legal framework (including the constitutional context, key social security legislation and so on), basic demographic data, the scope of social insurance and assistance schemes, the administration of social security, coordination with other states and suggestions for further reading. The section is an impressive piece of work – the limited sources available on these jurisdictions and the ground covered is testament to the depth and breadth of research that underpins the book. However, as it is to be expected given the structure adopted, this section of book lends itself best as point of reference or as a springboard for further research – readers would have to be made of strong stuff to read it from start to finish.

The final part draws some overarching comparisons between the case studies and offers some practical recommendations. On the former, perhaps the most interesting observation is how little originality is present in most of the small jurisdictions. Most retain the core approaches (and even in some cases, the same social security schemes) that characterise the jurisdiction’s time prior to independence; a problem that Pieters characterises as “conservatism and absence of originality” (pg. 274-275). Pieters then closes with twenty-one recommendations for small jurisdictions, some of which have application to larger states. They range from the lofty – such as “defining the goals” your social security system seeks to achieve – to the more granular – such as introducing arrangements on social security remittances to deal with citizens returning after a career spent abroad.

Pieters peppers the book with the idea of “legal transplants” in the social security context. Despite the initial enthusiasm and the early “excursion” into the concept, it somewhat fizzles out once the core task of the twenty case studies and the practical recommendations are underway. The reader gets the sense that Pieters had aimed to do more of this cross-cutting analytical work when Part I was initially written, but that the demands of covering the breadth of case studies and the more practically-oriented recommendations that emerge from them took precedence. The book remains an important contribution that will act as a key reference point for both researchers and policy-makers interested in social security provision in small jurisdictions. There is the future potential – based on this work – to tackle some of the broader questions about what this means for our current approaches to social security scholarship that are explored less in this book.