The year preceding the European elections has represented for the European Union a crucial period marked by growing anti-EU sentiment and the difficult implementation of its thoroughly overhauled socio-economic governance. After years of in-depth innovation accompanied by hopes of a revival and revamping of the E(M)U social dimension, European institutions have been engaged in heated debate about how to exit the recession and relaunch the integration project. While most member states have continued to pursue punitive austerity programmes – at a time when 27 million Europeans are unemployed and a quarter of the EU population is at risk of poverty – most stakeholders (including the trade union movement) and policymakers are agreed on the need for an EU-driven growth strategy.

This new edition of Social developments in the European Union – covering trends and events in 2013 – provides key insights from analysts and scholars. On the basis of a critical assessment of EU economic governance as it has been conducted over the last few years, contributors have come up with a set of guidelines for a reinforced EU social protection and investment plan. The proposals for a pan-European unemployment insurance scheme and an EU minimum income scheme are analysed alongside a renewed focus on the gender dimension of European social policies. Beyond economic and social governance, this volume critically reviews national reforms of labour market policies. While the condition of the European economy continues to look gloomy, the institutional and policy reforms proposed here represent an opportunity to open up a new way forward for Europe.