

Tax-related research trends in new EU member states: A bibliometric analysis in the last two decades

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Abstract: The main objective of the paper is to provide a comprehensive and in-depth examination of tax-related research in new EU member states over the past two decades. Specific objectives of the bibliometric analysis include: 1) examining descriptive indicators, including the most pertinent documents; 2) finding the most impacting countries, journals, and authors; and 3) examining research hotspots by considering the evolution over time. A bibliometric analysis is used to pursue these objectives, allowing for an innovative approach to a literature review and significantly upgrading traditional literature review techniques. Bibliometric analysis is based on the Scopus database, consisting of 885 scientific articles published between 2001 and 2021 addressing tax-related issues in new EU member states. In this context, several established and innovative bibliometric approaches are applied. The results reveal the modest growth of the research in the first observed decade, followed by significant growth in the second observed decade. Most of the research has been conducted in the Visegrad group of countries (i.e., the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland) and published in different relevant sources from Central and Eastern Europe, such as *Finance a Uver - Czech Journal of Economics and Finance* and *E a M: Ekonomie a Management*. Furthermore, the most productive authors in new EU member states are affiliated with the University of Žilina, Slovakia. Finally, inequality and welfare, tax evasion, tax reform, inequality and poverty, tax support, earnings management, policy and growth, corporate taxation, unemployment, and tax types are identified as the main research hotspots. The main purpose of the study is to provide the foundation for further research and the basis for evidence-based policymaking, which may facilitate tax policy reforms in the future.

Points for practitioners: The paper presents an interesting and comprehensive insight into the tax-related research trends in new EU member states, often experiencing higher public budget contraction and its negative consequences resulting in weaker overall economic performance. The findings are beneficial not only for the scientific community to identify research gaps in tax-related issues but also for evidence-based policymaking to appropriately address tax-related issues in the future.

Keywords: tax, taxation, new EU member states, research trends, bibliometric analysis

1 Introduction

The challenges related to tax policy have been significant concern over the years. Recent globalization and digitalization trends, which the Covid-19 pandemic has further emphasized, have revealed that the tax policy agenda in the European Union (EU) is essential in contributing to the overall objective of enabling fair taxation and sustainable growth (European Commission, 2021). Despite financial globalization having resulted in the unification of monetary policy in the EU, tax systems remained an important pillar of national policies, resulting in considerable differentiation at the country level. Especially due to the recent digitalization processes, the tax systems of countries are exposed to strong competition as the tax base becomes increasingly mobile (Podvievzko et al., 2019). Especially in recent decades, the EU has experienced a reduction in the corporation and top personal income tax rates and, even more recently, an increase in tax competition through preferential tax regimes targeting the most mobile segments of the company and personal income bases (Flamant et al., 2021).

Competition, by economic theory, is considered a driver of greater market effectiveness, which is explained through the effective allocation of sources. However, this cannot be completely ensured by tax competition due to market failure; namely, the taxpayer is not given any equivalent against tax paid (Nerudová, 2004). The probable consequence of high tax competition can be viewed as the reduction of the fiscal budget of the country or undermining and/or weakening of the distribution system. Accordingly, tax policy constitutes a central pillar of the national economies in the EU member states since tax revenues provide governments with the financial resources they need to exist and function effectively. However, the budget to GDP ratio contraction has occurred, especially in the new EU member states, such as Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia, Romania, and others.

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Moreover, small budgets have further negative consequences resulting in weak overall economic performance (Raišienė, 2015; Kuklytė, J., & Raišienė, 2018; Podvieszko et al., 2019).

Accordingly, well-established tax cooperation might be an appropriate approach for the EU to mitigate the harmful consequences of globalization and digitalization trends, consequently improving tax revenue collection, public goods provision and social equity (Flamant et al., 2021). Therefore, modernization of the existing tax systems and tax policy reforms are important in reducing tax evasion, mitigating the shadow economy, allowing fair taxation, and providing higher sustainable economic growth (Remeur, 2015). Due to the current challenges related to strained public budgets, tax-related issues are increasingly attractive topics for research, especially in the new EU member states, which are vulnerable to the challenges mentioned above.

Accordingly, the paper aims to provide a comprehensive and in-depth examination of tax-related research in new EU member states over the past two decades. Specific objectives of the bibliometric analysis include: 1) examining descriptive indicators, including the most pertinent documents; 2) finding the most impacting countries, journals, and authors; and 3) examining research hotspots by considering the evolution over time. A bibliometric analysis is used to pursue these objectives, allowing for an innovative approach to a literature review and significantly upgrading traditional literature review techniques (Ravšelj et al., 2022). The paper is structured as follows. After the introduction section, the next section presents the literature review on existing and recent bibliometric studies on tax-related research. The following section explains the materials used and the methods applied. The next section presents the main results of the bibliometric analysis. The paper ends with a conclusion in which the main findings are summarized.

2 Literature review

Some recent bibliometric studies in the existing literature attempted to analyze the tax-related research. Using the bibliometric analysis, Barbu et al. (2022) examined and mapped the optimal taxation research thematic structure on 1011 publications from the Web of Science published between 1975 and 2021. They found that there is a global level of interest in the optimal taxation research, whereby the United States was identified as the most prominent country, followed by the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, France, China, Japan, Sweden, Italy and Australia. They also established that the most recent scientific inquiries are focused on 'optimal taxation', 'model taxation', 'policy', 'tax', 'income taxation', 'capital income' and 'income' with 'elasticity', 'inequality' and 'consumption' being identified as the research hotspots of the last five years. Moreover, Fauzan et al. (2022) performed a bibliometric analysis on 715 documents on tax compliance research publications from the Scopus database published between 1960 and 2021. They established that the scientific production on tax compliance has grown significantly in the observed period and that the most prominent documents and authors come from the United States, Australia, Europe, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Finally, they identified potential themes for future research, namely 'voluntary tax compliance', 'SMEs', 'corruption', 'sales tax compliance', 'tax fairness', 'tax compliance costs', and 'tax amnesty'.

A bibliometric study from Issah and Rodrigues (2021) examined the nexus between corporate social responsibility and corporate tax aggressiveness research based on 139 documents from the Scopus database published between 2003 and 2020. They established that the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom are the most significant contributors to this research topic. Moreover, the findings suggest that the interest in corporate social responsibility and corporate tax aggressiveness research has increased, especially in recent years. Moreover, Buele and Guerra (2021) performed a bibliometric analysis to examine scientific production related to tax evasion based on 361 documents from the ScienceDirect database published between 2010 and 2020. They found that most of the documents are published in European journals and that the efficiency of the tax authorities is the most analyzed determining factor regarding tax evasion.

Moreover, to examine goods and service tax research patterns, Dhar and Khandelwal (2020) performed a bibliometric analysis of 177 documents from the Scopus database published between 2004 and 2019. The results reveal that India, Australia and Malaysia are the most productive countries in this research area and that the research focused on different business areas such as financial inclusion, supply chain management, advertising and economics. Further, to investigate environmental taxes research, Bashir et al., 2021 conducted a bibliometric analysis of 476 documents from the Web of Science database published between 1999 and 2019. They found that the United States leads the academic research contribution, whereas China has provided the most research publications in recent years. Moreover, they established that 'climate change', 'environmental taxes', 'double dividend', 'carbon tax', and 'environmental pollution' are the hotspots within academic literature.

A bibliometric study from Atayah and Alshater (2021) aims to examine the 154 documents on audit and tax in the context of emerging technologies. Based on 154 documents from the Scopus database published between 1986 and 2020, they found that the United States, Australia and China have led this research area. They also established that utilizing emerging technologies offers promising opportunities to reduce the risk of tax evasion and enhance auditors' efficiency. Moreover, to examine tax regulation on blockchain and cryptocurrency, Peláez-Repiso et al. 2021 performed a bibliometric analysis of 343 papers from the Web of Science database published between 2015 and 2019. They found that the United States and China have the leading role in this research area, whereby the 'security', 'framework' and 'information' were identified as the driving themes.

The short review of the existing bibliometric studies on tax-related research reveals that the studies differ in the sources utilized (Web of Science, Scopus, ScienceDirect) and their focus (tax optimization and compliance, tax aggressiveness and evasion, specific taxes and nexus between taxation and emerging technologies) consequently leading to different findings and conclusions. This paper is thus aimed at upgrading and supplementing the existing bibliometric studies by presenting a comprehensive examination of tax-related research trends in new EU member states in the last two decades while using established and innovative bibliometric approaches.

3 Materials and methods

The comprehensive bibliometric information on tax-related research in new EU member states were retrieved on 1 January 2022 from Scopus, a world-leading bibliographic database of peer-reviewed literature. The Scopus was preferred because it is considered a larger database than other competitive databases such as Web of Science (Falagas et al., 2008). This was further confirmed with the initial search using the same search query in both databases, revealing that Scopus provided more relevant documents than Web of Science. Moreover, compared to Scopus, Web of Science has been found as a database that significantly underrepresents scientific disciplines of the Social Sciences and Arts and Humanities (Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016). Accordingly, Scopus appears to be a more relevant bibliographic database meeting the specifics of the tax-related research in new EU member states.

The search query covered content-related keywords, i.e. tax and taxation and geographic-specific keywords, including new EU member states and the general EU. The search was further limited to: 1) the subject areas of Economics, Econometrics and Finance and Business, Management and Accounting; 2) the document type of Articles; and 3) the period between 2001 and 2021. The exact search query (without time limitation) used in the advanced Scopus online search engine was the following: (TITLE-ABS-KEY (tax) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (taxation)) AND (TITLE-ABS-KEY (bulgaria) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (croatia) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (cyprus) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (czech*) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (estonia) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (hungary) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (latvia) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (lithuania) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (malta) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (poland) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (romania) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (slovak*) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (slovenia) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (eu) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (europe*)) AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA,"ECON") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA,"BUSI")) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE,"ar")). Finally, a manual review of the retrieved documents revealed that some documents addressed tax-related research on old EU member states and were consequently excluded from the database. Following the presented multiphase process, 885 documents were identified as eligible for further bibliometric examination on tax-related research in new EU member states.

The bibliometric analysis utilized several bibliometric approaches and software tools. The descriptive overview was conducted using the Python Data Analysis Library Pandas (McKinney, 2012) and visualized using Python Visualization Library Matplotlib (Hunter, J. D., 2007). These Python libraries were also applied to examine scientific production across countries, sources and authors. Finally, network analysis was conducted with Python Network Analysis Library NetworkX (Hagberg et al., 2008), allowing for the creation, manipulation, and study of the structure, dynamics, and functions of complex networks.

4 Results

4.1 Descriptive overview

The descriptive overview presented in Table 1 shows the main characteristics of the tax-related research in new EU member states. This research area covers a total of 885 documents written by 1437 distinct authors listing 2294 keywords and published in 262 sources in the period 2001-2021. About two thirds (68%) of these documents have at least one citation, while about one third (34%) were written by a single author. Moreover,

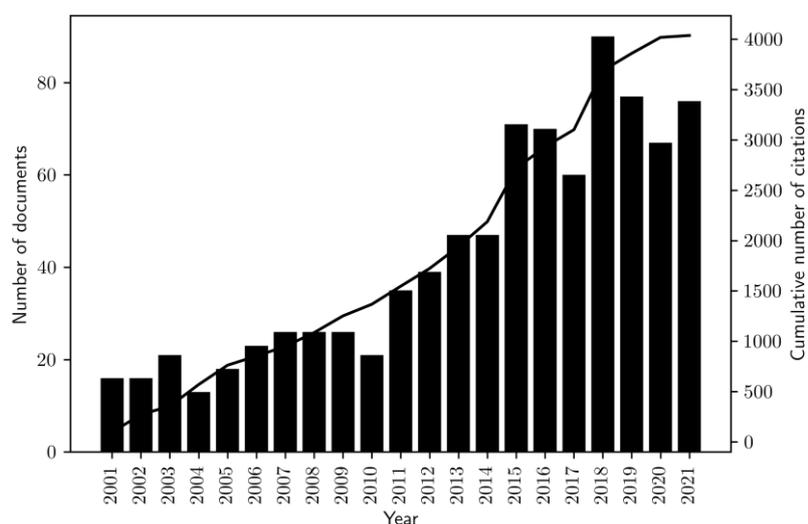
the number of authors per document (2.12) in this research area is slightly lower than in comparable scientific categories, such as Economics (2.30), Business Finance (2.40) and Business (2.50) and Management (2.50). Moreover, the average number of references per document in this research area is 32.94, which is significantly below Economics (79.00), Business Finance (44.00), Business (67.00) and Management (75.00) scientific categories (Patience et al., 2017), suggesting that tax-related research in new EU member states is grounded on a smaller number of the existing studies compared to general research areas. Finally, for this research area, 4.56 citations per document can be observed.

Table 1. Descriptive overview of tax-related research in new EU member states (2001-2021).

Bibliometric items	Findings
Timespan	2001-2021
Documents	885
Cited documents	599
Single-authored documents	304
Distinct authors	1437
Sources (Journals, Books, etc.)	262
Author's keywords	2294
Authors per document	2.12
References per document	32.94
Citations per document	4.56

The frequencies of the number of documents and cumulative citations by year in the tax-related research in new EU member states are presented in Figure 2. During the observed period 2001 and 2021, there are 885 documents with documents growing on average by 8% per year, which received 4038 cumulative citations. Further insight reveals that the average growth of documents in the first decade was modest (3% per year), while a much higher growth can be observed in the second decade (12% per year), with the last three years revealing the decline in the number of documents. The lowest number of documents can be found in 2020 when the attention has presumably focused on the topics related to Covid-19, which significantly affected the production of non-Covid-19 research.

Figure 1: Distribution of documents and citations by year in the tax-related research in new EU member states (2001–2020).



The most relevant (top 10) highly-cited documents in the tax-related research in new EU member states are presented in Table 2. The most discussed topics in these documents are corporate finance (Kliestik et al., 2018; Bauer, 2004), the institutional environment (Manolova & Yan, 2002; Hanousek & Palda, 2004), business development (Papasolomou-Doukakis et al., 2005; Bauer, 2004) and environment and health (Petrinic et al., 2015; Bíró, 2015; Dace et al., 2014; Barisa et al., 2015).

Table 2. Most relevant documents in the tax-related research in new EU member states (2001–2020).

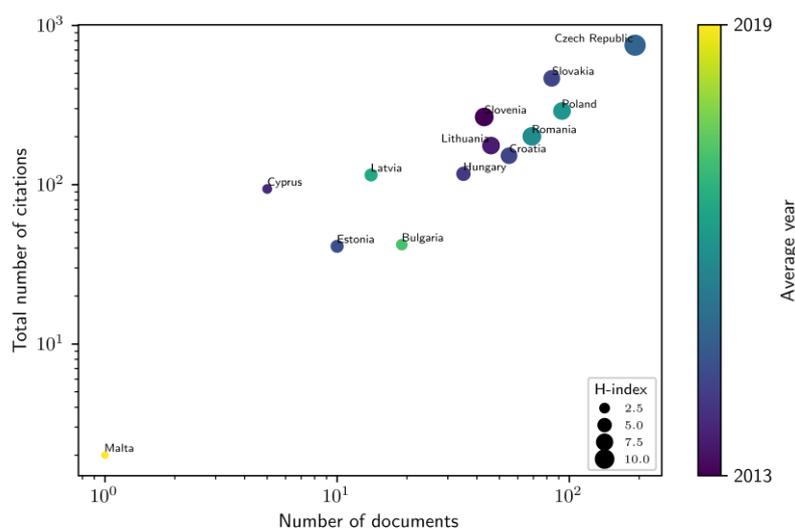
Authors	Year	Document title	Source title	Cited by
Kliestik T., Misankova M., Valaskova K., Svabova L.	2018	Bankruptcy prevention: New effort to reflect on legal and social changes	Science and Engineering Ethics	198
Manolova T.S., Yan A.	2002	Institutional constraints and entrepreneurial responses in a transforming economy: The case of Bulgaria	International Small Business Journal	97
Papasolomou-Doukakis I., Krambia-Kapardis M., Katsioloudes M.	2005	Corporate social responsibility: The way forward? Maybe not!: A preliminary study in Cyprus	European Business Review	88
Kliestik T., Valaskova K., Nica E., Kovacova M., Lazaroiu G.	2020	Advanced methods of earnings management: Monotonic trends and change-points under spotlight in the Visegrad countries	Oeconomia Copernicana	80
Petricin I., Korenak J., Povodnik D., Hélix-Nielsen C.	2015	A feasibility study of ultrafiltration/reverse osmosis (uf/ro)-based wastewater treatment and reuse in the metal finishing industry	Journal of Cleaner Production	77
Bíró A.	2015	Did the junk food tax make the Hungarians eat healthier?	Food Policy	68
Bauer P.	2004	Determinants of capital structure empirical evidence from the Czech Republic	Finance a Uver - Czech Journal of Economics and Finance	61
Dace E., Bazbauers G., Berzina A., Davidsen P.I.	2014	System dynamics model for analyzing effects of eco-design policy on packaging waste management system	Resources, Conservation and Recycling	53
Hanousek J., Palda F.	2004	Quality of government services and the civic duty to pay taxes in the Czech and Slovak republics, and other transition countries	Kyklos	53
Barisa A., Romagnoli F., Blumberga A., Blumberga D.	2015	Future biodiesel policy designs and consumption patterns in Latvia: a system dynamics model	Journal of Cleaner Production	51

4.2 Scientific production

The scientific production across countries, sources and authors, is presented in terms of the number of documents and citations, whereby additional information is provided by the size of a circle, revealing the h-index as a measure of the scientific impact (Harzing & Van Der Wal, 2009) and by the color of a circle, presenting the time dimension in scientific production.

The scientific production of the new EU member in the tax-related research is presented in Figure 4. Most research has been conducted in the Visegrad group of countries. Namely, the Czech Republic, with the highest h-index, was identified as the most productive, followed by Slovakia and Poland, as suggested by the most significant number of documents and citations in all these countries. Despite Malta being identified as a country lagging far behind the other countries, it is found to be only recently involved in tax-related research.

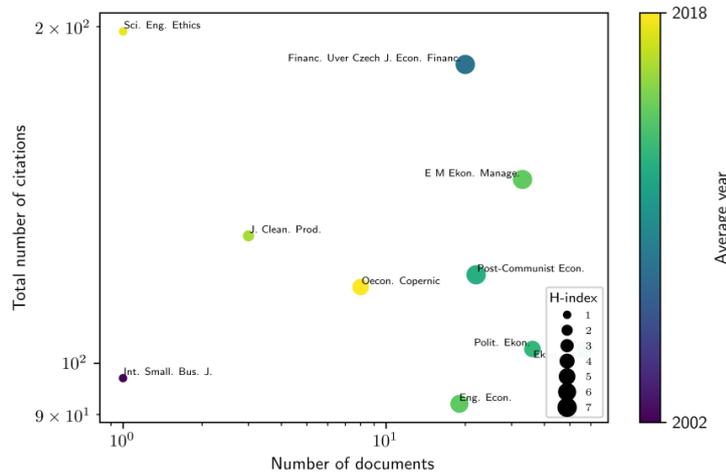
Figure 2. Scientific production of the EU member in the tax-related research (2001-2021).



Moreover, the most relevant (top 10) highly-cited sources in tax-related research in new EU member states are presented in Figure 3. Focusing on sources from new EU member states, the most prominent sources are

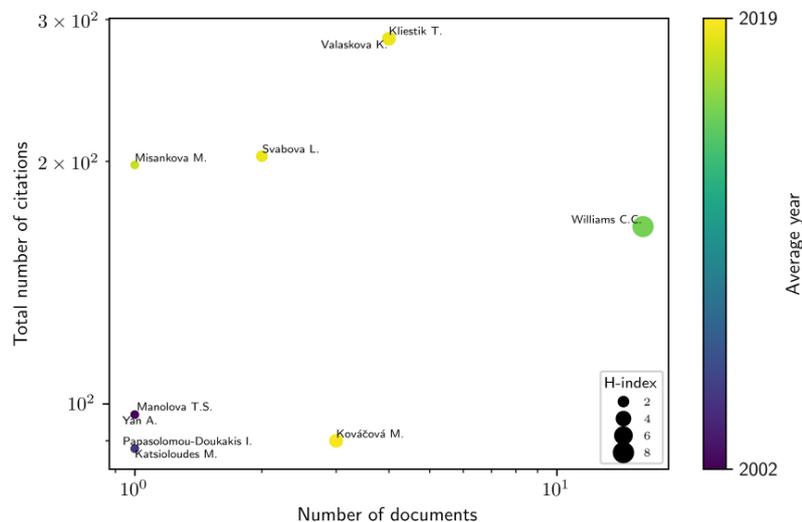
Finance a Uver - Czech Journal of Economics and Finance (Czech Republic), E a M: Ekonomie a Management (Czech Republic), both having a relatively big number of documents and citations, while Ekonomicky časopis (Slovakia) was identified as a source with the biggest number of documents followed by Politicka Ekonomie (Czech Republic) and Engineering Economics (Lithuania). Finally, Oeconomia Copernicana (Poland) was identified as the source of the most recent published documents in this research area.

Figure 3. Most relevant sources in tax-related research in new EU member states (2001-2021).



Furthermore, the most relevant authors in tax-related research in new EU member states are presented in Figure 4. In terms of the number of documents, Williams C.C. (University of Sheffield, United Kingdom) was identified as the most relevant author, however, not being affiliated with the institution in new EU member states. Nevertheless, he collaborates with authors from these countries (i.e., Romania, Croatia and Slovakia) in shadow economy research. Focusing on authors affiliated with the institution in new EU member states, the most productive authors in terms of the number of citations are Kliestik T., Valaskova K., Svabova L., and Misankova M. (University of Žilina, Slovakia).

Figure 4. Most relevant authors in tax-related research in new EU member states (2001-2021).

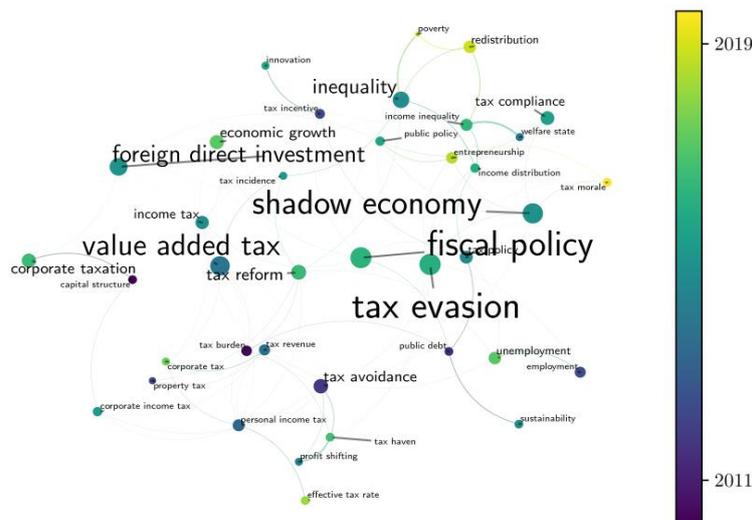


4.3 Network analysis

The network analysis, i.e., the keyword co-occurrence analysis, is presented in Figure 4. It is conducted on the author's 41 most relevant keywords, where the nodes represent the keywords and links as well as the co-occurrence relations between keywords. Note that the node size is in proportion to the number of keyword occurrences, showing research intensity (node degree), the link width is in proportion to the co-occurrences between keywords (edge weight), while the node color indicates the development of key concepts over time (Wang et al., 2020; Ravšelj et al., 2022). A general overview of the presented network reveals that at the

beginning of the period, published literature primarily focused on 'tax burden' and 'tax avoidance' in the middle of the period on 'shadow economy' and 'tax evasion' and most recently on 'redistribution' and 'tax morale'.

Figure 5. Keyword co-occurrence network in tax-related research in new EU member states (2001-2021).



Moreover, the keywords representing the main concepts are emerging in the form of ten clusters, indicating the main research hotspots in tax-related research in new EU member states. These clusters are: 1) inequality and welfare; 2) tax evasion; 3) tax reform; 4) inequality and poverty; 5) tax support; 6) earnings management; 7) policy and growth; 8) corporate taxation; 9) unemployment; and 10) tax types. A detailed synopsis of the research hotspots, including the top keywords in tax-related research in new EU member states, is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Research hotspots based on keyword co-occurrence network in tax-related research in new EU member states (2001-2021).

Research hotspots	Keywords
Inequality and welfare	income inequality, welfare state
Tax evasion	tax evasion, shadow economy, foreign direct investment, tax compliance, entrepreneurship, public policy, tax morale
Tax reform	value-added tax, tax reform, tax burden, tax incidence, property tax
Inequality and poverty	inequality, redistribution, income distribution, poverty
Tax support	tax incentive, innovation
Earnings management	tax avoidance, tax haven, profit shifting
Policy and growth	fiscal policy, economic growth, income tax, tax policy, sustainability, public debt
Corporate taxation	corporate taxation, corporate income tax, capital structure
Unemployment	unemployment, employment
Tax types	personal income tax, tax revenue, effective tax rate, corporate tax

5 Conclusion

The tax policy agenda in the EU is essential in contributing to the overall objective of enabling fair taxation and sustainable growth (European Commission, 2021), as it constitutes a central pillar of the national economies by providing governments with the financial resources they need to exist and function effectively. However, recent globalization and digitalization trends further exposed by the Covid-19 pandemic have revealed several challenges, significantly affecting public budgets and the overall economic performance of national economies (Raišienė, 2015; Kuklytė, J., & Raišienė, 2018; Podvieszko et al., 2019). Accordingly, tax-related issues are increasingly attractive topics for research, especially in the context of new EU member states, being especially vulnerable to those challenges.

The results of a bibliometric analysis on tax-related issues in new EU member states reveal the modest growth of the research in the first observed decade, followed by significant growth in the second observed decade. Most of the research has been conducted in the Visegrad group of countries (i.e., the Czech Republic, Slovakia

and Poland) and published in different relevant sources from Central and Eastern Europe, such as *Finance a Uver - Czech Journal of Economics and Finance* and *E a M: Ekonomie a Management*. Furthermore, the most productive authors in new EU member states are affiliated with the University of Žilina, Slovakia. Finally, inequality and welfare, tax evasion, tax reform, inequality and poverty, tax support, earnings management, policy and growth, corporate taxation, unemployment, and tax types are identified as the main research hotspots. These findings importantly complement the existing bibliometric studies in this research area, as all of them were focused on the global perspective, significantly neglecting specific characteristics of the region and/or a country. Namely, setting, collecting and spending taxes are the domains of national governments, and at least some regional-specific characteristics should be considered when examining tax-related issues (European Commission, 2018). The findings provide the foundation for further research and the basis for evidence-based policymaking, which may facilitate tax policy reforms in the future.

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