

2026 IMISCOE Spring Conference

Governing and Experiencing Migration in Contentious Times

16-18 March 2026

Campus Pitteurs of University of Liège (Rue de Pitteurs, 18, 4020 Liège) & online (Webex)

SCHEDULE AT A GLANCE

MONDAY, 16 MARCH 2026

09:00-10:30	Board of Directors Brainstorming Session (Part I, internal meeting) & PhD Network activities: <i>Being an early-career researcher in contentious times</i> (Part I)
10:30-10:45	Coffee break
10:45-12:15	Board of Directors Brainstorming Session (Part II, internal meeting) & PhD Network activities: <i>Being an early-career researcher in contentious times</i> (Part II)
12:15-13:15	Lunch break
13:15-15:15	Board of Directors meeting (internal meeting)
15:15-15:30	Coffee break
15:30-17:45	Opening Plenary: <i>Migration policy reforms in a context of fragilization of democratic institutions</i> (in English, with simultaneous translation to French)
17:45-18:00	Coffee break
18:00-19:30	Semi-Plenary 1: <i>Quel rôle pour les ONG dans les débats polarisés sur les migrations ? / What role for CSOs in polarized migration debates?</i> (in French, with simultaneous translation to English)
20:00	Reception

TUESDAY, 17 MARCH 2026

09:00-10:30	Panel Session 1 (parallel panels)
10:30-10:45	Coffee break
10:45-12:15	Panel Session 2 (parallel panels)
12:15-13:15	Lunch break
13:15-14:45	Semi-Plenary 2: <i>Diversity, equity and inclusion in contentious times</i> (in English, with simultaneous translation to French)
14:45-15:00	Coffee break
15:00-16:30	Panel Session 3 (parallel panels)
16:30-16:45	Coffee break
16:45-17:45	Side event: Book launch & panel conversation: <i>A new wave of anti-racism in Europe?</i> (in English, with simultaneous translation to French)
17:45-18:45	Side event: <i>Rencontre chercheur-euses et associations. Meeting between scholars and associations</i> (with simultaneous translation in French and English)
20:00	Cinema side event: <i>"The Jacket"</i> film screening & discussion (VO Arabic with English subtitles)

WEDNESDAY, 18 MARCH 2026

09:00-10:30	Panel Session 4 (parallel panels)
10:30-10:45	Coffee break
10:45-12:15	Panel Session 5 (parallel panels)
12:15-13:15	Lunch break
13:15-15:15	Closing Plenary: <i>Researching and communicating about migration in contentious times: A reflexive approach</i> (in English, with simultaneous translation to French)
15:30-17:00	Side event: <i>Guided tour of the city with a local association: "Migration Pathways"</i> (in French, with simultaneous translation to English)

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETINGS

Monday, 16 March 2026, 09:00-15:15 CET

Hybrid event: Building L3, Ground floor, Room 13 (Amphi) & online (Webex)

Board of Directors Brainstorming Session - Part I, internal meeting (09:00-10:30)

Board of Directors Brainstorming Session - Part II, internal meeting (10:45-12:15)

Board of Directors internal meeting (13:15-15:15)

PHD ACTIVITIES

BEING AN EARLY-CAREER RESEARCHER IN CONTENTIOUS TIMES

Monday, 16 March, 09:00-12:15 CET

Hybrid event: Building A4, 20 Août, Ground floor, Room R100 & online (Webex)

Session 1: Panel Discussion (09:00–10:30)

Panelists: Myriam Cherti (University of Oxford & Mohammed VI Polytechnic University); Marco Martiniello (University of Liège); Xingcheng Wen (University of Liège & University of Amsterdam)

Session 2: Interactive Workshop (10:45–12:15)

Thematic roundtables: Engagement with Civil Society and Research Community; Knowledge Production Under Pressure; Publication in Politically Charged Contexts

PLENARIES

OPENING PLENARY

Migration policy reforms in a context of fragilization of democratic institutions

Monday, 16 March, 15:30-17:45 CET

Hybrid event: Building L3, Ground floor, Room 13A (Amphi) & online (Webex)

In English, with simultaneous translation to French

Moderators: Daniela Vintila (University of Liège); Jean-Michel Lafleur (University of Liège)

Speakers: Madalina Moraru (University of Bologna); Ernesto Castañeda (American University)

SEMI-PLENARY 1

Quel rôle pour les ONG dans les débats polarisés sur les migrations ? / What role for CSOs in polarized migration debates?

Monday, 16 March, 18:00-19:30 CET

Hybrid event: Building L3, Ground floor, Room 13A (Amphi) & online (Webex)

In French, with simultaneous translation to English (interpretation headsets limited to 60 units)

Moderator: Başak Yavçan (Migration Policy Group)

Speakers: Julie Pascoet (European Network against Racism); Mehdi Kassou (Plateforme citoyenne de soutien aux réfugiés / Citizen Platform in Support of Refugees); Didier Van der Meeren (Le Monde des Possibles / World of Possibilities); Sibylle Gioe (Ligue des droits humains / Belgian Human Rights League); Anne Dussart (Caritas International Belgium)

SEMI-PLenary 2

Diversity, equity and inclusion in contentious times

Tuesday, 17 March, 13:15-14:45 CET

Hybrid event: Building L3, Ground floor, Room 13A (Amphi) & online (Webex)

In English, with simultaneous translation to French

Moderator: Hassan Bousetta (University of Liège)

Speakers: Billie Martiniello (European University Institute); Gunjan Sondhi (Open University); Florence Caeymaex (University of Liège)

CLOSING PLENARY

Researching and communicating about migration in contentious times: a reflexive approach

Wednesday, 18 March, 13:15-15:15 CET

Hybrid event: Building L3, Ground floor, Room 13A (Amphi) & online (Webex)

In English, with simultaneous translation to French

Moderators: Marco Martiniello (University of Liège) & Elsa Mescoli (University of Liège)

Speakers: Kenza Oumlil (Al Akhawayn University); Ricardo Gutiérrez (European Federation of Journalists), Anna-Lisa Müller (Bielefeld University);

SIDE EVENTS

BOOK LAUNCH & PANEL CONVERSATION- A NEW WAVE OF ANTI-RACISM IN EUROPE? RACIALIZED MINORITIES AT THE CENTRE

Tuesday, 17 March, 16:45-17:45 CET

Hybrid event: Building L3, Ground floor, Room 13A Amphi & online (Webex)

In English, with simultaneous translation to French

Panelists: Ilke Adam (Vrije Universiteit Brussel), Jean Beaman (City University of New York); Mackda Ghebremariam Tesfau (University of Padua); Sibo Kanobana (Open University of the Netherlands)

Discussant: Sophie Withaecx (Maastricht University)

RENCONTRE CHERCHEUR·EUSES ET ASSOCIATIONS (MEETING BETWEEN SCHOLARS AND ASSOCIATIONS)

Tuesday, 17 March, 17:45-18:45 CET

Hybrid event: Building L3, Ground floor, Room 13A Amphi & online (Webex)

With simultaneous translation in French and English

Panelists: Marie Sterkendries (CRIPEL- Regional Integration Centre in Liège); Younes Esfandiyar (INTERRA); Sandrine Tshibangu (VSP- The voice of sans-papiers of Liège); Farid Nagui (SeTIS Wallonia- Translating and interpreting services); Nathalie Rémy (F41)

“THE JACKET” – FILM SCREENING & EXCHANGE WITH DIRECTOR MATHIJS POPPE

Tuesday, 17 March, 20:00 CET

Cinema Sauvenière/Les Grignoux (Place Xavier Neujean 14, 4000 Liège) & online (private link to be shared with online conference participants who registered for the online screening)

VO Arabic, with English subtitles available at the cinema and French, English and Dutch subtitles available for the online version.

Register [here](#) by March 1st to secure your ticket for on-site or online attendance.

GUIDED TOUR OF THE CITY WITH A LOCAL ASSOCIATION: “MIGRATION PATHWAYS”

Wednesday 18 March, 15:45-17:30 CET

Departure from the conference venue: Rue de Pitteurs 18, 4020 Liège

The tour will be conducted in French, with simultaneous translation available in English

Register [here](#) by March 1st to secure your spot for the guided tour.

DETAILED PANELS

TUESDAY, 17 MARCH 2026, 09:00-10:30 CET

- PANEL 1 (ON-SITE, Building L5, Floor 1, Room 1/1): Experiencing and contesting discrimination in contemporary societies
- PANEL 2 (ON-SITE, Building L5, Floor 1, Room 1/6): Migrants' strategies for navigating structural limitations in contentious times
- PANEL 3 (ON-SITE, Building L3, Ground floor, Room 0/51): Constructing, negotiating, and contesting migration narratives
- PANEL 4 (ON-SITE, Building L5, Floor 2, Room 2/5): Cultures of disbelief? Trust, evidence, and authority in asylum systems
- PANEL 5 (ONLINE): Rethinking borders: Control, agency, and migration regimes
- PANEL 6 (ONLINE): Local arenas of migration governance, belonging, and contestation
- PANEL 7 (ONLINE): Forced displacement and precarious protection systems
- PANEL 8 (ONLINE): Governing migration in Europe: Alliances, control, and policy instruments

TUESDAY, 17 MARCH 2026, 10:45-12:15 CET

- PANEL 9 (ON-SITE, Building L5, Floor 1, Room 1/1): Party politics, political discourses, and migration debates
- PANEL 10 (ON-SITE, Building L5, Ground floor, Room 0/3): Volunteering and (contested) solidarities in polarized times
- PANEL 11 (ON-SITE, Building L5, Floor 2, Room 2/5): Civil society, community actors, and migration governance in contentious times
- PANEL 12 (ON-SITE, Building L3, Ground floor, Room 0/51): Rethinking the politics of provision: Intermediaries and street-level bureaucracy
- PANEL 13 (ONLINE): The politics and experiences of labor mobilities
- PANEL 14 (ONLINE): Between harm and help: Violence, care, and community response
- PANEL 15 (ONLINE): Belonging under pressure: Migrants navigating contentious times and spaces

TUESDAY, 17 MARCH 2026, 15:00-16:30 CET

- PANEL 16 (ON-SITE, Building L5, Floor 1, Room 1/1): Migrants' political engagement in challenging times
- PANEL 17 (ON-SITE, Building L5, Floor 1, Room 1/6): Rethinking EU asylum and migration governance in contentious times
- PANEL 18 (ON-SITE, Building L3, Ground floor, Room 0/51): Populism and migration governance
- PANEL 19 (ON-SITE, Building L5, Ground floor, Room 0/3): Migrant agency and forms of resistance in contentious times
- PANEL 20 (ONLINE): Judicial practices and the politics of immigration control
- PANEL 21 (ONLINE): Migrant labor and care in uncertain times
- PANEL 22 (ONLINE): Borders, belonging, and attitudes towards migration
- PANEL 23 (ONLINE): Migrant agency, resistance, and the politics of recognition
- PANEL 24 (ONLINE): Language, faith, belonging, and resilience across borders

PANEL 25 (ONLINE): (Un)making citizenship: Privilege, exclusion, and belonging

WEDNESDAY, 18 MARCH 2026, 09:00-10:30 CET

PANEL 26 (ON-SITE, Building L5, Floor 1, Room 1/1): UNIC-MITIME@IMISCOE session:
Temporalities of migration: Narratives, precarities, and urban transformations

PANEL 27 (ON-SITE, Building L5, Floor 1, Room 1/6): Controlling migration: Policies of departure,
return, and inclusion in comparative perspective

PANEL 28 (ON-SITE, Building L5, Ground floor, Room 0/3): (Im)mobilities, aspirations, and
vulnerabilities in uncertain times

PANEL 29 (ON-SITE, Building L5, Floor 1, Room 1/5): Migration categories, recognition, and the
politics of belonging

PANEL 30 (ONLINE): Immigration rhetorics in comparative perspective

PANEL 31 (ONLINE): The role of CSOs and non-state actors in migration and inclusion

PANEL 32 (ONLINE): Migrant children, families, and the politics of protection

PANEL 33 (ONLINE): Migrant activism and adaptive repertoires of resistance

WEDNESDAY, 18 MARCH 2026, 10:45-12:15 CET

PANEL 34 (ON-SITE, Building L5, Floor 1, Room 1/6): Stratified mobilities and labor market
policies

PANEL 35 (ON-SITE, Building L5, Floor 1, Room 1/1): State control, migration governance, and
border management

PANEL 36 (ON-SITE, Building L5, Ground floor, Room 0/3): Religious diversity and belonging in
polarized times

PANEL 37 (ON-SITE, Building L5, Floor 1, Room 1/5): From policy to practice: Governance,
knowledge, and agency in migration contexts

PANEL 38 (ONLINE): Media, migration, and the politics of representation

PANEL 39 (ONLINE): Migration regimes and the politics of regularization

PANEL 40 (ONLINE): Contested sovereignties and the politics of migration governance

TUESDAY, 17 MARCH 2026
09:00-10:30 CET

PANEL 1 (ON-SITE, Building L5, Floor 1, Room 1/1):

EXPERIENCING AND CONTESTING DISCRIMINATION IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETIES

Chair: Elif Beyza Dincer (University of Liège)

Discussant: Sebastian Rinken (Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas)

1. *Technological transformation in the Dutch labor market and skills shortages: The role of perceived discrimination*

Colleen Boland (Radboud University); Tesseltje de Lange (Radboud University)

Abstract: The Netherlands is facing labour shortages in essential sectors, with deficits including digital skills and technical skills related to green and energy transitions (CEDEFOP, 2024; UVW, 2024). For over a decade, ruling governments, including with support from the far right, have repeatedly underlined that labour migration is a last resort—despite calls from employers or advisory bodies to open legal pathways (De Lange, 2023). After the most recent (2024-2025) extreme-right government collapsed, labour and migration features in election agendas with, from the so-called right to the left, calls for migration restriction. At the same time, labour migration policies are only part of the picture in a tense societal climate. This work first maps migration and interlinked policies in the Netherlands, before examining: interviews with Dutch stakeholders implicated in skilling and employment of beneficiaries of protection and migrants; and, focus groups with migrants and beneficiaries that explored their experiences surrounding skills and labour market insertion. The research question is twofold: 1) To what extent do migration (and interlinked policies) address the shortages in the dual transition; and b) what kind of reception migrant and beneficiary workers perceive regarding their labour participation and skill sets. According to participants already present in the Netherlands (depending on characteristics of intersectional difference), reception of migrant and beneficiary skills sets remains fraught with perceptions of discrimination, or an exclusionary climate. This casts doubt as to whether policies aimed at adapting to labour market transformation to address urgent transitions would have much effect without societal or stakeholder receptiveness.

2. *“My name is a barrier”: Coping with discrimination in the rental housing market*

Billie Martiniello (European University Institute)

Abstract: Housing discrimination remains a significant barrier to inclusive and equitable societies. While field experiments have documented discrimination against ethnic minorities, less attention was given to lived experiences during the housing search and the coping strategies individuals employ. This study adopts a mixed-methods approach to examine how perceived rental discrimination – encompassing personal experiences versus group-level perceptions, and experienced versus anticipated discrimination – influences the adoption of coping strategies among Belgians of North- and Sub-Saharan African origin. Drawing on 14 semi-structured in-depth interviews and being the first to analyze formal housing discrimination reports (N=333) in Brussels, filed over the past five years with the Belgian Interfederal Organization for Equal Opportunities (Unia), this study uncovers key findings. Results reveal a discrepancy between perceived and objectively measured discrimination, with discrimination primarily attributed to realtors, not proprietors. The personal-group discrimination discrepancy is reaffirmed, explained by the subtle nature of discrimination, individual-level rationalization and anticipated discrimination. Both active and passive coping strategies emerge, while willingness to report is low due to emotional factors, pragmatic barriers, perceptions of efficacy, and knowledge gaps. The findings underscore the need for a comprehensive policy framework addressing structural market shortages as well as an anti-discrimination policy extending beyond awareness-raising efforts.

3. *Agency under constraint: Anticipated discrimination and job-seeking strategies of new migrants*

Jef Bormans (Vrije Universiteit Brussel); Eva Van Belle (Vrije Universiteit Brussel)

Abstract: This paper examines how newly arrived migrants in Belgium navigate labor market opportunities in a context marked by rising anti-immigrant sentiment and restrictive policies. We draw

on a unique survey conducted with migrants who arrived in Belgium within the past five years, which includes questions on experiences of discrimination, wellbeing, and sense of belonging. This dataset provides an important opportunity to analyze how migrants perceive and react to the contentious environment they encounter upon arrival. To capture how these experiences shape economic decision-making, we embed a conjoint experiment within the survey. Respondents are presented with pairs of hypothetical job vacancies that vary randomly along key attributes, including contract type, pay level, and indicators of potential bias. This design allows us to study whether both lived experiences of and the anticipation of future discrimination affect the kinds of jobs migrants choose to pursue. In doing so, we connect individual perceptions of exclusion to concrete strategies in the labor market.

4. *Mobilising against racism in contentious times: Context, challenges, and coalition dynamics*
Shannon Gouppy (University of Liège)

Abstract: This communication explores how the current political context has influenced anti-racist civil society in French-speaking Belgium, and its relationships with migrant-related causes. It draws on ethnographic fieldwork conducted between June 2022 and March 2025 with anti-racist activists across the Brussels and Wallonia regions. In the run-up to the 2024 elections, many activists expressed apprehension about a tightening political climate. These fears were confirmed by the February 2025 government agreements under the new De Wever government, which marked a sharp acceleration in neoliberal policies coupled with authoritarian shifts in areas such as policing, justice, defence, and asylum and migration (Evrard & Piron, 2025). Against the broader backdrop of the far right's rise and mainstreaming (Corcuff, 2021) across Europe, including in Belgium, civil society associations have encountered structural constraints, significant challenges, and new stakes. The objectives of this communication are twofold. First, it analyses how these contentious times have impacted anti-racist mobilisations in French-speaking Belgium. Activists report facing shrinking civic spaces, growing repression, criminalisation of activism, and reduced access to resources. Second, it interrogates the ambivalent relationship between anti-racist struggles and causes for and of migrants. It explores how the current context reshapes these relationships, and what possibilities remain for coalition-building. These analyses are situated within the sociology of collective action.

PANEL 2 (ON-SITE, Building L5, Floor 1, Room 1/6):

MIGRANTS' STRATEGIES FOR NAVIGATING STRUCTURAL LIMITATIONS IN CONTENTIOUS TIMES

Chair: Denis Zeković (Technische Universität Chemnitz)

Discussant: Óscar Prieto-Flores (University of Girona)

1. *Transit in illiberal times: Neo-nationalisms and migrant solidarities in North Africa*
Montassir Sakhi (UM6P-Morocco)

Abstract: The rise in restrictive policies and racialised discourses surrounding migration is not confined to destination countries in Europe; it also reshapes routes and living conditions in so-called 'transit countries'. Morocco and Tunisia are emblematic of this phenomenon, caught up in the ever-shifting dynamics of EU border externalisation that constantly alter the locations of blockages and reconfigure transit geographies. Based on ethnographic research conducted in 2024–2025, including interviews with sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco, Moroccans attempting to cross from Tunisia, forensic doctors working at the Sousse morgue and families of missing persons, this paper examines the impact of the current contentious context on migrants' ability to react, resist and organise. While the interviews address initial motivations for departure, they particularly illuminate strategies of solidarity when the migratory project collides with repression or turns into catastrophe (disappearance, death at sea or detention). These narratives reveal practices of mutual aid among migrants, as well as within families and transnational networks that are confronted with uncertainty and loss. At the same time, the analysis highlights institutional practices such as police repression, the dismantling of camps and the criminalisation of mobility, as well as unexpected forms of solidarity, such as in Tunisian forensic medicine, where no distinction is made between the bodies of nationals and migrants. By articulating institutional violence with multi-scalar solidarity, this communication directly addresses the question posed by the conference: how do migrants create spaces of dignity and action in transit contexts in 'illiberal times'?

2. *Entrepreneurial transit: Yemeni immobility and agency in Malaysia*

Waleed F. Mahdi (University of Oklahoma)

Abstract: Understood as a transit rather than a destination, Malaysia presents a governance structure that marginalizes refugees and renders them immobile, if not deportable. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), which functions as the de facto protection regime, offers renewable annual residency permits to 200,260 refugees as of 2025, without work or travel authorization, and without access to rationed assistance, affordable public education, and healthcare. Meanwhile, refugees without such temporary residencies are often considered illegal immigrants subject to detention and deportation, as per the country's Immigration Act (1959/63). This paper examines how thousands of Yemeni refugees have experienced the dynamics of such governance assemblage ever since the collapse of the Yemeni state in 2014. It does so by highlighting the advocacy efforts to successfully lobby the Malaysian government to establish an exceptional category for Yemenis, affording them annually renewable residency permits with more privileges not available to UNHCR refugees. In navigating the overlapping yet divergent UNHCR procedures and Malaysian ad hoc administrative directives, many Yemenis have further carved out livelihood spaces in Kuala Lumpur and other urban hubs by crafting Yemen-themed entrepreneurial niches in food, tourism, and education. In tracing these advocacy and entrepreneurial efforts, this paper sheds light on how Yemenis have exercised agency in this contentious environment to stabilize livelihoods and rework meanings of home and belonging in a transit state. This case study advances a theoretical understanding of the term "entrepreneurial transit" and its implications for navigating structural limitations, building relational infrastructures, and mediating aspirations in transit states.

3. *Waiting for change: Returnee agency and sensemaking in Lithuania*

Indra Lukosiene (Vytautas Magnus University)

Abstract: This presentation explores how Lithuanian returnees navigate their return in a political and social climate where local environments are often resistant to change. Drawing on qualitative interviews and fieldwork (Lukošienė on workplace practices; Ciubrinkas, 2023, 2025 on return trajectories and the moral economy), this study examines how returnees exercise and reinterpret their agency through processes of sensemaking (Weick, 1995). Returnees frequently describe their return as a moral responsibility to contribute to their homeland. Yet their capacity to act is shaped not only by workplaces and communities but also by the broader political context of local governance. In some municipalities and organisations, supportive leadership enables the adoption of new practices and norms. In more closed environments, however, returnees encounter resistance: innovations are dismissed as "foreign," premature or politically unwelcome. Rather than disappearing, agency is redirected. Returnees establish small-scale projects, informal networks or entrepreneurial ventures that enable them to circulate ideas and lay the groundwork for future change. This shows that return migration is less about straightforward transfers of knowledge and more about the ongoing negotiation of belonging and legitimacy. Through sensemaking, returnees reinterpret contradictory cues from abroad and home, reframing their return as self-realisation, community contribution or professional mission. Their everyday strategies highlight both the limits of migrant agency under resistant local conditions and the creative ways migrants sustain influence when direct institutional change is blocked. By situating these dynamics within the wider politicisation of migration in Europe, the paper demonstrates how returnees negotiate agency, belonging and transformation in contested local contexts.

4. *Prospecting a Brussels yet to be: From prefigurative infrastructuring practices to urban scenarios for redrawing precarious citizenship*

Luce Beeckmans (KU Leuven); Mieke Groeninck (Odisee University of Applied Sciences & KU Leuven); Elisabeth Mareels (Odisee University of Applied Sciences); Mieke Schrooten (Odisee University of Applied Sciences)

Abstract: In a time of contentious migration policies, the lived experience of being a migrant is increasingly shaped by institutional lock-ins and political paralysis. This is also visible in Brussels, where up to 100.000 people in precarious citizenship face a socio-spatial lock-in in a city caught between mere crisis management and the national-level governance constraints. This double lock-in, both of people and of urban policy, creates a 'crisis of imagination' in the city. The ATLAS project (Access To Shelter And Social Infrastructure) responds to this paralysis by exploring how people in precarious citizenship navigate, resist, and transform their everyday environments – despite exclusion, neglect or abandonment. Drawing on Lemanski's (2020) notion of infrastructural citizenship, we examine how migrants and people in solidarity with them assemble forms of belonging and care, not through formal

recognition but through everyday acts of infrastructuring and citizenship: by accessing alternative housing, organizing legal aid, sharing care, and co-creating alternative social infrastructures. After having mapped and futured prefigurative practices and potentialities already embedded in the present through interviews, participant observation, desk research and co-creation labs, our prospective research by design approach centers migrants' perspectives and practices as building blocks for future scenarios for the city. While giving attention to critical factors and uncertainties, these scenarios, as sites of political imagination and (disruptive) action, highlight how even in contexts of precarious citizenship, infrastructural practices can unlock a common space for alternative futures.

5. *Reconfiguring legal consciousness in administrative detention*

Emma Vescovi (University of Liège)

Abstract: Over the past few decades, migration policies across Europe have become increasingly restrictive, driven in large part by populist and far-right political discourses. In Belgium, this shift has resulted in a systematic reduction of the rights granted to non-citizens, deepening the gap between fundamental rights and those effectively guaranteed to individuals with precarious—or no—legal status. Administrative detention is a key illustration of this gap: the lack of residence rights takes precedence over the right to liberty, family life, and health. This paper investigates how the experience of administrative detention shapes the legal consciousness of detainees. Facing the threat of deportation, individuals attempt to assert their right to remain on national territory. Legal action is often initially perceived as the most legitimate way to “seek justice,” grounded in the belief that the Belgian judiciary will uphold fundamental rights. However, structural barriers—including the limited availability of legal representation, selective file screening linked to strategic litigation, and the low success rate of release petitions—lead many detainees to question the effectiveness of the legal system. Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted with individuals who have been detained in administrative detention centres, this paper explores how detention transforms legal consciousness and redefines the meaning of legal mobilization. It argues that facing judicial inefficacy, undocumented migrants are compelled to reconfigure their strategies, often turning to extra-legal avenues to assert their rights—such as negotiating directly with local administrations to reintroduce residence permit applications (when possible), or using their body as a form of resistance against deportation.

PANEL 3 (ON-SITE, Building L3, Ground floor, Room 0/51):

CONSTRUCTING, NEGOTIATING, AND CONTESTING MIGRATION NARRATIVES

Chair: Xingcheng Wen (University of Liège)

Discussant: Pascal Debruyne (Odisee University College)

1. *The societal dangers of migration narratives revisited: Aid fatigue, othering, functionality on the Belarusian-Polish EU border and Ukrainian refugees*

Izabela Grabowska (Kozminski University)

Abstract: This paper, as a follow-up to Kozminski University's CRASH Research Center institutional application, revisits and extends previous analyses of migrant narratives by critically examining the societal dangers of negative migration narratives amidst escalating ideological polarization and contentious debates in Europe. Focusing on the Belarusian-Polish border and the evolving situation of Ukrainian refugees in Poland, the paper highlights how political actors across the spectrum—including centrists—mock and challenge populist migration rhetoric. Unlike a monolithic governmental stance, these actors contribute variably to the dissemination and contestation of politicized migration narratives, which are often based on alternative facts and serve to polarize societies through mechanisms of othering, aid fatigue, and political functionality. Building on Grabowska (2023) *Frontiers | Societal dangers of migrant crisis narratives* with a special focus on Belarussian and Ukrainian borders with Poland and empirical insights from the Horizon 2020 MIMY project's Delphi stakeholder study and reinforced by findings from the attached article, the paper illustrates how the highly securitized framing of the Belarusian-Polish border leads to restrictive policies, pushbacks, and escalation of border violence, while civil society actors face burnout amid sustained humanitarian crises. In contrast, Ukrainian refugees initially received broad solidarity in Poland, but rising societal fatigue and growing hostility complicate their inclusion and integration. By situating these specific cases within broader European migration governance debates, this study interrogates how negative migration narratives shape policy outcomes

and migrant experiences. It advocates for reflexive research approaches to critically address the conceptual and methodological challenges posed by these polarizing narratives in migration scholarship.

2. *Merging class and ethnoracial identity narratives in a cross-national experiment: Toward greater social cohesion and equity*

Eduardo Campbell-Bethancourt (Utrecht University); Özge Bilgili (Utrecht University); Marcel Lubbers (Utrecht University)

Abstract: In the past two decades, populist radical right-wing parties (PRRPs) have gained support across Europe. Central to their rise are narratives portraying ethnoracialized minorities and migrants as threats to the “native” population. Such rhetoric undermines social cohesion by reinforcing an “us vs. them” mindset and fueling intergroup tensions. Our study investigates which political narratives can counter these divisive frames and instead foster interethnic class solidarity and cooperation among both ethnoracial majority and minority groups. In particular, we examine how narratives may weaken boundary-making based on ethnoracial identity and migration status, and whether their effectiveness depends on individuals’ propensity to support the radical right. Conceptually and methodologically, our study is novel as the first cross-national survey experiment on political narratives that merge class and ethnoracial identity as a strategy for social cohesion. Conducted in March 2025 within the Horizon Europe project RAISE, it adopts an intersectional view of ethnoracial identity — considering ethnicity, skin color, and religion — and an interdisciplinary lens. The survey includes nationally representative samples of 2,000 respondents in Belgium, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, Poland, and Türkiye, enabling both causal inference and broad generalization. We employ a between-subjects experimental design with three conditions: (a) a general-class-narrative, (b) a merged-class and ethnoracial-identity narrative, and (c) an ethnoracial-fear narrative. This design allows us to test the effects of competing political narratives on solidarity, measured in three different ways, to experiment with whom solidarity is expressed. Data collection has been completed, and we expect to present full results at the conference.

3. *Political communication in times of fake news against migrants in UK and Spain (2024-2025)*

Elisa Brey (Complutense University of Madrid)

Abstract: In Southport (UK), in July 2024, three little girls were murdered. The murderer was soon arrested, but violent riots targeting refugees and Muslims took place in several cities. In Mocejón (Spain), in August 2024, another young teenager was murdered. The extreme right immediately claimed that Muslims or non-accompanied minors were responsible for the crime, using Telegram and X accounts to spread fake news. To debunk fake news, mainstream journalists, activists and the public prosecutor strongly reacted. No riots took place. The murderer, a Spanish young boy with severe mental issues, was arrested 36 hours after the tragic incident. In Spain, in July 2025, an elderly man was bitten by three Moroccan men. This time, riots took place with extreme right activists coming from other places to threaten the migrant population in Torre-Pacheco (Murcia). Through the media coverage of the three events, the aim of this paper is to identify: 1) the (lack of) recognition of migrants and ethnically diverse groups by the press when they are targeted by fake news, and 2) the capacity of authorities to build (or not) culturally informed communication. The following questions will be raised: 1) Who the media present as reliable sources? 2) Do activists/leaders with a migrant or ethnically diverse background participate into public debates? 3) Do authorities build trust through a culturally informed communication? Mixed methods will include priming and discourse analysis, by comparing media coverage of a conservative and a progressive newspaper in both countries, after the initial crimes.

4. *Advocating for undocumented immigrant regularization in contentious times: Why information frames matter for public support*

Abdeslam Marfouk (University of Liège); Jean-Michel Lafleur (University of Liège)

Abstract: Undocumented immigrants in European countries often encounter hostility and xenophobia. In this context, it is unsurprising that programs to regularize their status, whether partial or large-scale, encounter political opposition and create concern among the general public. However, research has overlooked potential differences in public opinion regarding different subcategories of undocumented immigrants by focusing on them as a homogeneous group. Additionally, the literature has not examined how framing affects individuals’ support for regularization, which is an important limitation. To address these gaps, this article uses pre-registered experiment, embedded in a survey of the Belgian public, to test whether individuals are more inclined to support the regularization of different categories of undocumented immigrants depending on the framing of the information (economic, emotional,

humanitarian, numerical, or social justice terms). This insight may help design interventions that strengthen public support for the regularization of undocumented immigrants.

5. *After the smoke clears? Analyzing the discursive framing of the 2024 Amsterdam riots as a migration issue*

Aly Amer (Utrecht University)

Abstract: The paper examines the November 2024 Amsterdam incidents, when violent altercations took place in the city's streets following a football match between Ajax (NL) and Israeli Maccabi Tel Aviv. Rather than being covered as hooliganism, the events were reframed by populist right-wing parties as resulting from migrants' "failed integration", specifically identifying Muslim, Arab and North African men as being culprits, who constitute an existential threat to Dutch societal cohesion. The media's coverage, through text and imagery, reinforced these tropes. The events connection with Gaza introduces a geopolitical dimension. The paper discusses (1) how these political actors constructed the 'failed integration' frame, (2) the historical references and emotive narratives they used, and (3) the cultural frames of reference that they deployed to delineate between those who do/do not belong to a Dutch nativist imaginary. Analysis of media coverage and actors' speech acts demonstrated the construction and reinforcement of the association between migranticized men and disorder/violence. This frame's propagators proposed punitive measures such as increased policing, banning protests, and stripping perpetrators of Dutch citizenship, evident of materializing exclusions. The analysis is based on a multimodal discourse analysis (textual and visual) using a multi-scalar framework that includes bodies, objects and spaces. The representations of these scales culminate into a constructed urban imaginary, which shapes migrants' material urban realities and lived experiences. The paper contributes a focused look into politicization, reframing and processual construction of migration 'problems' in discourse, and how their emotive nature is highly resonant in a politically anxious context.

PANEL 4 (ON-SITE, Building L5, Floor 2, Room 2/5):

CULTURES OF DISBELIEF? TRUST, EVIDENCE, AND AUTHORITY IN ASYLUM SYSTEMS

Chair: Anoshay Fazal (University of Liverpool)

Discussant: Veronica Federico (University of Florence)

1. *Unconventional evidence: When emojis replace emotions in refugee status determination*

Jessica Walmsley (University of Manchester); Gabriel du Plessix (University of Warwick)

Abstract: In the wake of the Brexit referendum, fuelled by rising anti-immigrant sentiment, the politicisation of the UK border, and an intensified culture of disbelief, it has become essential to consider the methods employed to differentiate between 'real' and 'bogus' asylum claims. With greater use of digital technologies in asylum procedures, there has been a shift towards prioritising unconventional forms of evidence as part of asylum claims, especially cases concerning LGBTQI+ applicants. This reflects a move away from qualitative forms of evidence, such as witness statements and testimonies, towards a new 'obsession' with digitised sources used to evidence sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Examples of this include dating apps, location data, intimate messaging histories, and the use of emojis. Focusing on three vignettes from the UK Upper Tribunal (Immigration and Asylum Chamber) transcripts, the paper contributes to literature on digital technology-driven asylum governance by adopting a data justice framework. This is done to trouble the hidden, immediate, and long-term consequences of the use of digital tools in refugee status determination. Therefore, the paper asks, how does an evolving, 'hostile environment' impact LGBTQI+ asylum seekers' ability to respond to and resist escalated standards of evidence? Ultimately, this paper reveals the complex power dynamics between institutional scepticism, digital evidence, and the construction of credibility within the UK's contentious post-Brexit asylum regime.

2. *Determining the age of asylum seekers based on psychosocial evaluations: Countering or reinforcing a culture of disbelief?*

Luc Leboeuf (University of Liège); Alix Ernoux (University of Liège)

Abstract: Asylum proceedings in Europe are plagued by a 'culture of disbelief', which reflects political contestations against the right to asylum (Anderson, Hollaus, Lindsay, and Williamson, 2014; Jubany, 2017). As a result, documents are given prominent evidentiary role – be it official documents, such as

passports (Andreetta and Borelli, 2024), or medical certificates (Fassin and D'Halluin, 2005). Proceedings to determine the age of refugees don't escape the trend. They mainly rely on medical evaluations, such as tests measuring the bone density. These tests have been criticized by civil society organisations due to their lack of accuracy, and they have been condemned by the European Court of Human Rights in the ruling *F.B. v. Belgium* of 6 March 2025. The EU New Pact changes this. The new EU asylum procedures regulation, which will be implemented on 12 June 2026, requires a multidisciplinary age assessment that involves psychosocial workers (Reg. 2024/1348). This paper will analyse the design of the new age assessment procedure in Belgium, based on the guidelines, legislations, and case-law, as well as participant observations (which were conducted during the stakeholder consultations that were organised by the asylum authority). It will evaluate if the reform weakens or reinforces the 'culture of disbelief': does it pave the way for evidentiary practices that duly acknowledge the words of migrant children? Or does it merely substitute psychosocial assessments to bone tests, while misusing the expertise of psychosocial workers?

3. *Refugee governance and the politics of belief: Credibility, apostasy, and non-religion in the UK asylum system*

Lucy Potter (University of York)

Abstract: This paper examines apostate asylum claims within the British asylum determination process and situates them within the increasing politicisation of asylum in the United Kingdom. While the 1951 Refugee Convention recognises religious persecution, those who renounce their faith remain largely invisible in refugee law and migration studies. As a result, apostate claimants face two types of marginalisation: first, within international human rights frameworks that overlook non-religious identities, and second, in Refugee Status Determination (RSD) procedures that often misrecognise or mistrust such identities. Drawing on fieldwork conducted between 2022 and 2023, including policy analysis of UK Home Office documents, international legal texts, and 34 interviews with asylum seekers and human rights advocates, this paper investigates how credibility is assessed in apostasy-based claims. These experiences are analysed against the backdrop of the UK's shifting political landscape, marked by the Nationality and Borders Act (2022) and the Illegal Migration Act (2023). Both acts institutionalise deterrence and impose higher evidentiary thresholds, reflecting Conservative government efforts to frame asylum as a matter of sovereignty and control. Within this hostile environment, apostate claimants are racialised and assessed through frameworks grounded in the UK's dominant understandings of non-religiosity. Such dynamics are entwined with post-imperial legacies and contemporary counterterrorism agendas, which collectively shape the credibility and visibility of non-belief in asylum processes. By highlighting the intersection of race, religion, and secular subjectivity within the UK's asylum regime, this paper demonstrates how governance reproduces epistemic hierarchies of belief and unbelief, underscoring the need for inclusive approaches to migration governance.

4. *Judges against the state: Political resistance, judicial oversight and Belgian asylum reception policies*

Sophie Andreetta (University of Liège)

Abstract: Between 2022 and 2025, the Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers was convicted more than 10,000 times by Belgian courts for failing to provide shelter to those in need. Over 300 applicants brought their cases to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) and won, yet the Agency continued to reject requests. In late 2025, reception laws were eventually amended to legalize some of the Agency's practices. Political scientists have used concepts such as lawfare and the judicialization of politics to highlight the role of (often higher) courts and litigation in the political arena. Shifting the analytical lens to a different scale, this paper examines the role of lower-level courts in the implementation of migration policy. It draws on ethnographic fieldwork in labour courts – the relevant jurisdiction to decide on social assistance matters, including asylum reception – to explore judges' understanding of law, their sense of (in)justice, professional ethos, and perceptions of their role in a context where state institutions are increasingly ignoring judicial decisions. The Belgian case will, therefore, help analyse the reciprocal pushbacks between public administrations and official ministry guidelines on the one hand, and the judiciary on the other hand, in determining migrants' rights. It will also further current understandings of policy-making, by highlighting how (even contested) bureaucratic practices can trigger legal changes.

5. *Earning the trust of refugees: Mapping institutional configurations of trust under temporary protection in Switzerland*

Didier Ruedin (University of Neuchâtel)

Abstract: What does it mean to navigate a social world in which prior institutional attachment (however fragile or contested) are no longer operative, while new institutional environments remain unfamiliar or formally temporary? And how, under such conditions of legal and procedural transition, is institutional trust configured and differentiated into distinct patterns of interaction? While the temporary protection regime has become a central feature of contemporary asylum governance, we still know little about how they shape trust-based relations between displaced individuals and government institutions. This research addresses this gap by empirically analysing how trust is formed between Ukrainian refugees and Swiss public institutions under the conditions of temporary protection (Status S). Building on the understanding that forced displacement entails not only spatial dislocation but also the interruption of legal continuity and procedural familiarity, the research conceptualises analysis to original survey data (N=1,470) collected in Switzerland in 2025, identifying diverse configurations of trust-based interaction with key following institutions that are structurally relevant within the Swiss asylum and social support architecture: the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM), cantonal migration offices, welfare services (social services and social workers) and the public healthcare system. Preliminary findings suggest the presence of internally differentiated trust configurations, including consistent, ambivalent, and paradoxical patterns. Based on obtained results, the research argues that trust is configured in an institutional way, influenced by legal liminality. It invites broader reflection on institutional inclusion in forced migration context. This research constitutes the empirical continuation of the conceptual framework (Hett, 2024).

Link: <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/human-dynamics/articles/10.3389/fhumd.2024.1445749/full>

PANEL 5 (ONLINE):

RETHINKING BORDERS: CONTROL, AGENCY, AND MIGRATION REGIMES

Chair: Giulia Bisogni (Edge Hill University)

Discussant: Fabio De Blasis (University of Milan)

1. *Datafying undocumented immigrants: Healthcare as border control in 'Trump's America' and in the United Kingdom's hostile environment*

Moises Vieira (The University of Manchester)

Abstract: This paper investigates how border control operates through the datafication of undocumented immigrants through their access to healthcare. Focusing on Trump-era US and the UK's hostile environment, it compares how immigration control is enacted through access to Medicaid and the National Health Service, respectively. Drawing on the analysis of official policy documents on healthcare and immigration, alongside the grey literature produced by charities supporting migrant communities, the paper reveals how healthcare systems have become pivotal sites of immigration enforcement. Theoretically, the paper builds on the notion of data politics to demonstrate how state-led practices of data collection generate a biopoliticised control of borders through healthcare. It engages with the literature on data activism, tracing how civil society organisations and migrant communities resist practices of surveillance through the datafication of immigrants. In doing so, this comparative analysis highlights similarities in how both contexts deploy healthcare data as a technology of bordering but also points to divergences in the scope of the policies and in the repertoires of resistance that emerge. By drawing on a Foucauldian reading of datafication, this paper uniquely bridges migration, health, and data politics by comparing the US and UK cases, showing how healthcare becomes a contentious site of border enforcement and resistance, thus offering fresh insight into Western migration governance in the so-called illiberal times. In this vein, this intervention further debates at the intersection of health and migration studies, demonstrating how migrants' access to healthcare reveals wider issues around entitlement to rights for foreigners and citizenship.

2. *Biopolitics at the border: Rethinking migrant agency and ideological alignment in the 2021 Belarus-EU crisis*

Wenyi Zhao (University of Warsaw)

Abstract: This paper examines the 2021 Belarus-EU border crisis through the lens of Foucault's biopolitics, traditionally confined to domestic governance, and extends it to the international arena where states strategically weaponize migration. While this framework helps elucidate how states deploy human mobility as geopolitical leverage, it often renders migrants as passive subjects, devoid of autonomy or

ideological agency. Drawing on discourse analysis and in-depth interviews, this study foregrounds migrant subjectivity and ideological orientation in a highly politicized migration context. Contrary to prevailing far-right narratives that portray migrants as threats to national identity and liberal democratic values, I hypothesize that many migrants demonstrate strong identification with the host country's cultural norms, national belonging, and even conservative values—often more so than segments of the native-born population. This ideological convergence calls into question the assumption that migration inherently undermines societal cohesion. Methodologically, the study employs narrative-based qualitative interviews with 20 asylum seekers and border-crossers from the Belarus-EU crisis, focusing on expressions of political identification, cultural assimilation, and perceptions of the host nation. These narratives are contextualized within broader discursive and biopolitical frameworks. The findings aim to shift the policy conversation beyond economic contributions and towards a reappraisal of migrants as ideological stakeholders. Rather than threats, migrants may serve as unexpected allies in upholding national cohesion and democratic resilience, thereby offering a discursive counter to exclusionary migration regimes.

3. *Is Japan externalising border control through development cooperation with Vietnam?*

Hiroki Ishimaru (Japan International Cooperation Agency)

Abstract: This paper examines the intersection of Japan's border control (BC) and development cooperation (DC) in the governance of labour migration with Vietnam, Japan's largest source of migrant workers. By analysing two major ODA-funded projects—anti-trafficking measures and broker regulation—the study highlights divergent trajectories in the securitisation of migration policy. While the Hotline Project retained a humanitarian orientation aligned with Vietnam's geopolitical concerns and Japan's diplomatic interests, the Direct Matching Project, though framed in terms of migrant protection, was subsumed into BC logics by prioritising the elimination of brokers. This shift overlooked Vietnam's structural dependence on brokers and diminished the agency of relevant stakeholders. The outcome was a dysfunctional initiative, resisted by actors in both countries, which failed to function effectively as either BC or DC. The study adopts a decolonial framework that combines insights from coloniality and assemblage theory to illuminate how BC and DC interact in practice. It identifies three conditions under which DC risks becoming subsumed into externalised BC—donor conditionalities, security-first priorities, and unaddressed root causes—while proposing stakeholder agency as a criterion for evaluation. By foregrounding these theoretical perspectives, the analysis shows how security and development become fused within the Japan–Vietnam migration nexus, paralleling EU–Africa cooperation and raising concerns about the erosion of developmental legitimacy. By situating Japan's policy within broader debates on the politicisation of migration, the paper contributes to understanding how securitised logics reshape governance, civil society engagement, and migrant agency in contentious times.

4. *National security at the border: Greece's suspension of asylum applications and the shift toward closed migrant reception*

Georgios Athanasiou (Antwerp University)

Abstract: This paper will critically interrogate Greece's recent migration policies, focusing on the suspension of asylum applications and the institutional shift toward closed migrant reception facilities. These measures, framed under the rhetoric of national security and border defense, represent a significant departure from Greece's obligations under EU and international refugee law. By presenting migration as a threat to sovereignty and internal order, the Greek State has sought to legitimize exceptional practices that undermine the right to asylum and erode fundamental rights protections guaranteed by the EU Charter and the Geneva Convention. The recent suspension on asylum application in 2025 for migrants arriving from north Africa epitomized an alarming trend toward derogation from international standards under the guise of emergency management. Similarly, the policy move toward closed reception centers reflects a structural securitization of migration, where human mobility is systematically conflated with risks to national security, criminality, and destabilization. These developments risk normalizing exceptionalism and developing a “state of emergency” model of border governance. The paper will argue that such policies not only contravene core principles of human rights protection but also contribute to the establishment of exclusionary practices at the EU's periphery, setting dangerous precedents for other member States. Moreover, by prioritizing sovereignty and security over solidarity and protection, Greece's approach accelerates the erosion of core EU constitutional values. Ultimately,

the study contends that these measures reveal how the language of national security is being instrumentalized to justify such restrictions.

5. *Legislative shifts in Australia's migration policy: Examining their impact on public opinion and the rise of anti-immigration sentiment*

Sherene Ozyurek (Victoria University)

Abstract: Recent anti-immigration rallies across Australia have emerged in response to the perceived surge in migration levels. While media outlets have sought to dispel this misconception by referencing official statistics, a more nuanced analysis reveals that legislative reforms within Australia's migration framework may be contributing to public unease. This paper examines significant legislative amendments introduced across various migration programs in the lead up to anti-immigration rallies which may give rise to the belief that Australia's traditionally restrictive migration policies have been relaxed. Reforms to the skilled migration program, including adjustments to work experience requirements, the introduction of new visa pathways for individuals displaced by global conflicts such as those in Afghanistan, Ukraine, and Palestine, and provisions under international trade agreements that have facilitated greater freedom of movement, have influenced and further shaped public sentiment. Whilst these changes attempt to address issues ranging from labour shortages to humanitarian obligations, they also risk amplifying public concerns about infrastructure strain, cultural integration, and national identity. Collectively, these legislative developments impact broad sectors of the community and may have contributed to the rise in anti-immigration sentiment, including public demonstrations involving a diverse cross-section of the Australian community. The complex interplay between legal reform and societal response is critical to understanding how communities respond globally. Australia's experience is a practical case study to gain deeper insights into community reactions and highlights the need for a balanced migration policy—one that considers both national interests and community concerns, rather than relying on reactive legislative change.

PANEL 6 (ONLINE):

LOCAL ARENAS OF MIGRATION GOVERNANCE, BELONGING, AND CONTESTATION

Chair: Aye Theingi (Waseda University)

Discussant: Eric Florence (University of Liège)

1. *Researching the local governance of arrival in contentious times: Shifting discourses, multi-stakeholder governance as well as empirical challenges within research on local refugee reception (in Leipzig/Germany)*

Anika Schmidt (Helmholtz-Centre for Environmental Research); Annegret Haase (Helmholtz-Centre for Environmental Research)

Abstract: The project REFRAME analyses shifting discourses, governance and practices related to the local arrival of refugees since 2015 in several case study cities. In this contribution, we will give insights in our research on the Governance of Arrival (Werner et al. 2018) in the city of Leipzig/Germany, which involves a dynamic interplay between a municipal and NGO stakeholders in the setting of a risingly international and post-migrant city. Our study builds on a a) media analysis, b) semi-structured interviews with municipality and civil society supporting refugees and c) focus group discussion with persons with a refugee biography. The research finds (structural) adaptation and learning processes as well as a professionalization of stakeholders. But these developments are embedded in the context of emotionalized/polarised public and political discourses, as well as selective solidarities. Thus, we identify a Governance of Arrival which is under dynamic change and rising pressure. Additional to this, we want to discuss challenges and reflections regarding the conduction of empirical work related to migration (e.g. the reluctance to participate or speak openly in interviews) and the situatedness of research within conflicts. The findings and reflections derive from case study research, but we see an overall relevance for migration research in other German and European contexts. The presentation will end with an invitation to ongoing exchange on ethical questions and critical engagement within a network of migration researchers we are involved in.

2. *Migration governance under right-wing populism: Istanbul as a site of bounded innovation*

Gülşen Doğan (Koç University)

Abstract: This article explores how Istanbul's municipal government handles migration under a centralized, right-wing populist regime. It connects migration and urban studies, highlighting cities' political agency in limited institutional contexts. Through 15 interviews with officials, NGO members, and scholars, the study looks at how the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (IMM) employs local strategies to navigate national restrictions. The findings show IMM's rights-focused approach contrasts with the national government's security-oriented migration policies, revealing fragmentation in urban governance due to political control. By examining Istanbul, the research adds to discussions on governance, right-wing populism, and local agency in hybrid systems, providing insights into urban migration management amid political challenges.

3. *Bridging economic, social, and spatial integration: Horizontal policy exchange and urban governance in the Swiss refugee context*

Ciara Patterson-Oumarri (Maastricht University); Reem Rasheed Husain Alhaj Saleh (The University of Jordan)

Abstract: Migration governance in Switzerland is shaped by both federal and cantonal authorities, with significant implications for refugee integration. This paper asks: How is refugee integration governed, framed, and regulated in Swiss federal and cantonal policy documents (using Canton Aargau as a case), and what does this reveal about the dynamics of multi-level governance? The study adopts a qualitative content analysis of legal texts, strategic plans, and programmatic reports (2014–2025). It investigates how integration is discursively constructed, operationalised, and differentiated across governance scales, engaging with debates in multi-level governance, policy framing, and the social and spatial politics of belonging. Findings reveal a scalar division of responsibilities: at the federal level, integration is framed through a regulatory, performance-based model emphasising economic activation and language acquisition; at the cantonal level, policy incorporates broader social and community-oriented measures, reflecting local capacities and priorities. Across both levels, spatial integration is notably absent, with housing and urban development relegated to the periphery of integration policy. The paper argues that bridging economic, social, and spatial dimensions of integration requires stronger horizontal policy learning between cantons and a federal framework that explicitly addresses territorial equity. The Swiss case illustrates how subnational governance can innovate in socially and spatially grounded approaches, while federal frameworks provide regulatory consistency. In a comparative perspective, it highlights dynamics relevant to other federal systems navigating contentious migration governance. Note: This research was completed as part of the SNIS Project: Camps and Camp-Like Settings in Urban Environments: Bridging Humanitarian and Development Activities.

4. *Visa categories and the attitudes towards highly skilled mainland immigrants in Hong Kong: A mixed methods research design*

Chuangjian Xin (The Chinese University of Hong Kong); James Downes (The Chinese University of Hong Kong); Kenneth Lai (The Chinese University of Hong Kong)

Abstract: Despite a growing body of literature on immigration in Hong Kong, existing research remains centered mainly on general or lower-skilled migrant populations, with comparatively little attention paid to the experiences and integration pathways of highly skilled migrants from Mainland China. This paper addresses this gap by presenting the first interdisciplinary study to systematically compare three major skilled migration schemes—namely, the Immigration Arrangements for Non-local Graduates (IANG), the Top Talent Pass Scheme (TPPS), and the Quality Migrant Admission Scheme (QMAS)—within the context of recent socio-political developments in Hong Kong. Drawing on secondary survey data and original qualitative interviews with both visa holders and local residents, this study examines how these policy frameworks shape migrant integration as well as local perceptions and divergent identity boundaries. In doing so, the paper engages broader theoretical discussions on migration governance, elite mobility, and identity construction, while contributing to an underexplored area of the scholarship on selective migration. Amid accelerated inflows of highly skilled migrants and ongoing transformations within Hong Kong's policy landscape, the research offers timely and empirically grounded insights that advance academic understanding of targeted immigration regimes and identity formation in a nuanced urban context of Hong Kong SAR.

PANEL 7 (ONLINE):

FORCED DISPLACEMENT AND PRECARIOUS PROTECTION SYSTEMS

1. *Spaces of exception and gendered precarity: How India's non-convention refugee framework reproduces illiberal migration governance through institutional multiplicity*

Subashini S S (University of Hyderabad)

Abstract: Building on Agamben's conceptualisation of the "state of exception" and feminist intersectionality theory, this paper interrogates how India's deliberate non-adherence to the 1951 Refugee Convention creates institutionalised spaces of exception that systematically reproduce gendered precarity among Sri Lankan Tamil refugees. Drawing on eight months of ethnographic fieldwork across refugee camps in Tamil Nadu and in-depth interviews with 16 refugee women and men, this study theoretically advances understanding of how illiberal migration governance operates through what I term "institutional multiplicity", overlapping yet contradictory authority structures involving state agencies, UNHCR, and civil society organisations that enable sovereign discretion while obscuring accountability. The research reveals how roll-call restrictions, employment prohibitions, and spatial confinement create what Lorey describes as "governmental precarization", where precarity becomes a technology of power rather than merely an outcome of economic vulnerability. My data demonstrates that refugee women experience "intersectional precarization," facing compound vulnerabilities through domestic violence (evidenced in single-parent households), workplace sexual harassment, and exclusion from formal labour markets that confine them to tailoring and domestic work. Yet these same women develop what I conceptualise as "resistant self-employment networks" that challenge state-imposed economic marginalisation while remaining structurally constrained within spaces of exception. This analysis contributes to IMISCOE's focus on contentious migration governance by demonstrating how non-Convention frameworks function as laboratories for illiberal control mechanisms that prioritise security over protection. By examining how Global South states manage long-term refugee populations through administrative discretion rather than rights-based frameworks, this research reveals the temporal dimensions of contemporary "illiberal times".

2. *When the spotlight moves: How shifting global priorities are leaving refugees behind*

Afrin Sohana Ahona (Jahangirnagar University); Sabrina Sultana Tithi (Jahangirnagar University)

Abstract: Funding global humanitarian aid has ceased to only focus on need. It takes into consideration current events, geopolitics and donor interests. This paper explores how aid allocation changes are affecting migratory flows due to a changing world order. This article examines how changing global aid objectives change refugee crisis governance and how this affects displaced people. Using the Rohingya refugee crisis in Bangladesh, it tries to argue what unfolds from a brokered silence when the world stops looking and the money is no longer a priority. The analysis is informed by critical humanitarianism and migration governance scholarship, particularly debates on the politics of aid and the contested notion of "neutral" humanitarianism. The current humanitarian relief available in Bangladesh has significantly exacerbated the living conditions of the Rohingya refugees. UNHCR has cut important services like healthcare, education, and housing maintenance; the World Food Program has reduced funding from \$12 to \$6 per person. The Rohingya aid crisis shows a reflection of shifting global priorities and political disinterest in a crisis once called "urgent." Newer crises are now receiving more resources and global attention. The already stateless and displaced Rohingya people seem to be slipping into invisibility. The paper draws on fieldwork-based refugee testimonies and systematic analysis of UNHCR and WFP policy reports, showing how aid governance decisions exacerbate refugee precarity. In doing so, the paper contributes to migration studies by questioning the neutrality of humanitarian practice and directly engages with the conference theme of governing and experiencing migration in contentious times.

3. *UNRWA funding cuts and the necessity of refugee autonomy*

Nasser Al-Khalidi (UCL Development Planning Unit)

Abstract: Over the past 10 years, UNRWA has witnessed funding cuts by donor states. This is intensified given the context of the ongoing genocide in Gaza. Funding cuts to UNRWA are seen as an intensification of a global war on the Palestinian people enacted through aid, particularly those living in refugee camps in the occupied territories, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. Such cuts have deepened the economic and social crisis affecting refugee camps. In reviewing this dynamic, this paper explores how funding cuts has deepened (re)/productive labor precarity in a Palestinian refugee camp, and how that has driven community interventions that exhibits potentials for labor autonomy in refugee contexts. I

particularly use the lens of labor and employment to look at the economic and social affects of UNRWA funding cuts on Gaza refugees living in the Jerash refugee camp in Jordan. Due to state restrictions on employment, UNRWA has long been perceived as one of the few sources of stable employment in refugee camps. However, with funding cuts, work in UNRWA has become more precarious, relying on daily-paid or project-based contracts. In other cases, funding from UNRWA to local initiatives has also deteriorated, leading many refugee initiatives to shut down or resort to other funding channels. More politically, and relevantly to labor politics, funding cuts to UNRWA has driven individuals and local initiatives to explore potentials for collectivized work. That is in the form of appropriation of formerly humanitarian spaces to create a space for collective autonomous work, and means of co-production.

4. *Internally displaced persons' integration in Georgia in a complex political context: State policy and social response*

Irakli Manvelidze (Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University); Malvina Jibladze (Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University)

Abstract: Since the 1990s, conflicts in Georgia, provoked with Russian support in Abkhazia and Shida Kartli (so-called South Ossetia), have generated a massive flow of internally displaced persons (IDPs), numbering over 300,000. Consequently, the integration of IDPs represents a significant social and political challenge in Georgia. This paper examines the Georgian state's policies supporting IDP integration and demonstrates how displaced persons navigate and enact their social and political agency within a complex context. The study employs a mixed-method approach, combining document analysis, semi-structured interviews with IDPs, and ethnographic observation in local communities. The article highlights the role of the state in providing housing, employment, education, and healthcare, the impact of politicized decisions, the engagement of civil society, and the integration of evidence-based data into policymaking. The IDPs' experiences reveal social, economic, and psychological challenges, as well as a sense of belonging and opportunities for integration into local communities. The paper directly aligns with the conference theme, which addresses migration governance and experiences in contested periods. It offers a conceptual contribution by systematizing IDPs' adaptation strategies for policy assessment and a methodological contribution through the application of a mixed-method approach. Findings indicate that, in a complex political environment, state and civil society policies significantly influence the quality of IDPs' social integration, while self-organization and adaptive strategies crucially shape social ties and community participation.

5. *Spatiocide in Gaza: Displacement, resistance, and the struggle to remain*

Eman Ismail (Independent researcher)

Abstract: This paper discusses the term Spatiocide as a central driver of forced displacement in Palestine since 1948, with a focus on the current devastation in Gaza. By targeting residential units, infrastructure, and essential services, Spatiocide is a systematic destruction of spaces as a way of dismantling life. It operates as a strategy of displacement that reshapes displacement patterns and undermines the right to remain. This research links closely to the conference theme on migration in difficult political times. It demonstrates how the spatial destruction becomes part of international politics, where humanitarian language often hides the real causes of displacement, and global actors remain passive in the face of systemic erasure. At the same time, the paper highlights Palestinian resistance through the politics of staying, rebuilding, adapting, and asserting presence despite the Spatiocide. This shows how displaced communities assert themselves even amid severe challenges. The research employs aerial imagery, satellite views, and warning-evacuation maps to document the scale of destruction and its impact on internal displacement. This analysis uses visual-spatial methods to reveal displacement patterns, contributing fresh insights to refugee studies and migration governance. In addition, the paper advances migration studies by introducing the term Spatiocide as an analytical category that links urban destruction, forced displacement, and migration governance. It argues for the recognition of Spatiocide as a distinct crime in international law, under the umbrella of Genocide or ethnic cleansing, to address spatial erasure as an intentional tactic of displacement.

PANEL 8 (ONLINE):

GOVERNING MIGRATION IN EUROPE: ALLIANCES, CONTROL, AND POLICY INSTRUMENTS

Chair: Zekiye Gürün-Ücem (Justus-Liebig-University of Gießen)

1. *Governing through disappearance: Illiberal alliances and the Italy–Tunisia migration regime*
Giulia Sezzi (Scuola Normale Superiore)

Abstract: The current global context of overlapping crises—economic and social instability, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the proliferation of wars—has fostered the rise of illiberal governments across both the Global North and South. Migration has become a key political tool in this process: right-wing governments mobilize anti-migrant populist rhetoric to consolidate support and legitimize a violent politics of forced return. Moreover, it lays the ground for foreign policy and new international alliances through bilateral agreements on border and migration control. In the Mediterranean, practices such as pushbacks, mass deportations, and invisible shipwrecks have become increasingly systematic through the collaboration between European and non-European states, materializing into a regime of enforced disappearance of unruly mobile bodies. This research conceptualizes enforced disappearance as a necropolitical rupture and examines how it is reintegrated into migration governance, as seen in the EU's Pact on Migration and Asylum and proposals for Return Hubs. To ground this analysis, the study focuses on the Italy–Tunisia migration route as an emblematic case. By reconstructing a specific episode of pushback and disappearance, based on testimonies from those affected, it investigates the microphysics of these practices. It also shows how they are legitimized through the alliance between the illiberal Italian government—supported by the European Union—and the authoritarian Tunisian regime, which, despite its anti-colonial rhetoric, accepts European economic support to advance anti-migrant politics.

2. *Governing migration through “nudging forward”: Tracing the reasons behind the secondary movements of beneficiaries of international protection from Greece*
Tihomir Sabchev (Tilburg University)

Abstract: Amid 2015's migration governance crisis in the European Union (EU), the Greek authorities were put under significant pressure by other EU Member States to properly register and process asylum seekers. As a result, the following years saw Greece greatly increasing its reception capacity and building one of the most efficient asylum systems in the EU. This prompted scholars and practitioners alike to conclude that Greece has finally relinquished its long-standing “transit country” label and has turned – albeit reluctantly – into a destination country for refugees. Recent developments, however, indicate that such assessments have been premature. Since 2020, more than 100,000 beneficiaries of international protection (BIPs) in Greece – in other words, most recognized refugees in the country – have used the refugee passports issued to them by the Greek authorities to travel to other EU countries, where they apply anew for asylum. The paper zooms in on these unprecedented in volume “secondary movements” of BIPs and traces the reasons behind them. To this end, it presents the results of a qualitative analysis of 15 semi-structured interviews with individuals who received refugee status in Greece and subsequently moved to the Netherlands and applied for asylum again. The findings suggest that the Greek authorities have developed a novel migration governance strategy that effectively shifts responsibility for BIPs by ‘nudging’ them forward to other EU Member States. The paper concludes with a discussion on the implications of this strategy for protection seekers and the Common European Asylum System.

3. *The future of EU migration governance: Harnessing the power of the multiannual financial framework 2028-2034 for effective and sustainable migration solutions*
Nives Mazur Kumric (University of Liège)

Abstract: On 16 July 2025, the European Commission put forth its proposal for a comprehensive and forward-looking Multiannual Financial Framework 2028-2034, designed to establish a long-term investment budget that aligns with Europe's aspirations to become a prosperous, secure, and thriving society and economy over the next decade. One of the principal transformative components includes a significant increase in funding for migration management, which has been tripled compared to the previous funding period (2021-2027). This paper provides an in-depth legal analysis of the MMF provisions and the relevant *acquis communautaire* (e.g. the Treaties, HOME regulations, and horizontal enabling conditions), facilitating Europe's establishment and implementation of a fair and effective migration management system in the coming ten years. The primary focus is on the pathway set by the Pact for Migration and Asylum, providing fast and efficient procedures, an effective system of solidarity and responsibility, and the integration of migration into international partnerships. A special emphasis is put on the potential consequences of its implementation starting in mid-2026, specifically regarding

migratory patterns and individual outcomes. The paper examines whether and to what extent the new design and additional resources will effectively manage and normalise migration in the long term, providing EU countries with the flexibility to address their specific challenges, while ensuring necessary safeguards to protect those in need. This research employs a legal-dogmatic approach to offer a fresh analysis of the evolving EU framework that is reforming the migration landscape.

4. *Effectiveness, sustainability and voluntariness: Swedish return and readmission policies in light of the TIDÖ agreement*

Aida Ibričević (Linköping University)

Abstract: In this article I critically examine return and readmission policies implemented in Sweden from the early 2000s to the TIDÖ agreement, signed after the October 2022 Swedish general elections. The TIDÖ agreement is a political agreement of Swedish right-wing parliamentary parties (Sweden Democrats, Christian Democrats, Liberals, and the Moderate Party) with substantial provisions on migration and integration, including return. My analysis employs the key concepts of effectiveness and sustainability of return migration governance, and voluntariness in returnees' decision-making. The main question guiding my inquiry is whether there is an observable trend of gradual restrictiveness in return and readmission policies within the Swedish context or if we can view the TIDÖ agreement as a paradigmatic shift in political discourse, policy making, and policy implementation? To reach my conclusions on the political dynamics producing policy measures, I present findings of the MORE Project: Motivations, Experiences and Consequences of Returns and Readmissions Policy: Revealing and Developing Effective Alternatives. My argument is based on a policy review of relevant return and readmission policies implemented in Sweden, supplemented with qualitative data analysis of 30 interviews and 3 focus groups conducted with Swedish officials implementing return migration policies, representatives of civil society organizations, and migrants at risk of return.

5. *Behind the visa: Selection mechanisms in Germany's liberalised labour migration regime*

Jennifer-Louise Robinson (Osnabrück University)

Abstract: Contemporary migration regimes combine openness and closure, with the visa as central tool for regulating access. This paper examines the mechanisms and criteria through which selectivity unfolds, arguing that it is not confined to a simple yes-or-no decision at the end of a visa procedure, but operates as a multi-dimensional process: it begins long before an application is submitted, continues through legal requirements defining eligibility for specific visa types, and culminates in the administrative implementation of the procedure. Germany's third-country labour migration policy serves as a case study, demonstrating that even amid successive policy liberalisations prompted by labour shortages, significant moments of selection persist. They appear at the political level in bilateral migration agreements and state-funded recruitment projects with selected countries; at the legal level in visa categories and requirements constructing pathways only for certain groups; and at the administrative level in the accessibility and conduct of visa procedures, which vary across countries. Special attention is given to how nationality and plausibility assessments shape outcomes, revealing practices beyond what is codified in law. Empirically, the paper draws on interviews with key actors such as policy-makers and case officers, complemented by an analysis of legal texts, internal guidelines, parliamentary documents, and case files.

By showing how selection mechanisms persist and transform within an overall liberalising policy field, the paper contributes to debates on the politicisation of migration governance and the differentiated experiences of migrants in contentious times. It demonstrates that liberalisation does not mark the end of selectivity, but its reconfiguration.

TUESDAY, 17 MARCH 2026
10:45-12:15 CET

PANEL 9 (ON-SITE, BUILDING L5, FLOOR 1, ROOM 1/1):

PARTY POLITICS, POLITICAL DISCOURSES, AND MIGRATION DEBATES

Chair: Valkyria Dantas Rattmann (University of Liège)

Discussant: Tuba Bircan (BRISPO, Vrije Universiteit Brussel)

1. *The impact of Chega on Portuguese immigration policy in the mid-2020s*

João Carvalho (CIES-ISCTE)

Abstract: Portuguese immunity to the far-right ended in the 2019 general elections after the election of Chega's leader to the Assembly of the Republic. By the snap 2024 general elections, Chega was the third most voted party at the national level and prevented the minority centre-right coalition from holding an absolute majority in the Assembly of the Republic. Within this context, this investigation will examine the impact of Chega on the policy of immigration control of the minority coalition government formed by the centre-right parties PSD and CDS. This political process was conceived as the ERPs' ability to promote a policy outcome that would not have been observed in the absence of the agency of the selected ERP (Carvalho, 2016). Immigration was quickly ranked as the top priority of the national government and U-turn was observed on inclusive and universal approach of the Portuguese state towards irregular immigration. Moreover, foreign citizens' access to the national health service was restricted and a restrictive reform of the nationality was proposed, which represents the return to the post-colonial paradigm observed until the mid-2000s. This paper will associate the policy developments with the intense political impact of Chega regarding the management of immigration by the centre-right coalition, which adopted a accommodative strategy towards the far-right party (Meguid, 2005). Considering Chega's electoral expansion in the snap 2025 general election, it is doubtful that the centre-right coalition's strategy will defuse public support for the Portuguese far right party.

2. *Emigration salience in election campaigns: A study of Spanish parties' political pledges to the diaspora*

Daniela Vintila (University of Liège); Marta Paradés Martín (Universidad Pontificia Comillas)

Abstract: How parties (promise to) represent mobile populations has triggered increased scholarly interest. In Europe, while scholars have thoroughly scrutinized party positions on immigration, far less is known about partisan stances towards diasporas, the salience of emigration in electoral campaigns, or the specific promises parties make to citizens abroad. To address this gap, we conceptually bridge theories of issue salience, diaspora representation, and party politics, arguing that emigration salience in parties' electoral pledges can be shaped by a constellation of factors, including emigrants' demographic and electoral weight, party ideology, and electoral competition. We test this in Spain, a country marked by a long emigration history, shifting party dynamics, and important external voting reforms. Methodologically, we combine analyses of emigration salience in party manifestos over four decades—using a novel coding scheme—with interviews with leaders of party branches abroad.

3. *'This is not migration policy, this is security, security, and security': Securitization of migrants in Finnish political discourse on instrumentalized migration*

Henna Nurmi (University of Helsinki)

Abstract: The paper analyzes the Finnish political discourse on instrumentalized migration in the latest cases at the eastern borders of the European Union and considers its societal impacts. The pressure from these operations sparked active debates on migration in relation to security at both national and international levels. Using discourse analysis and a theoretical framework of securitization and 'othering', the paper examines key political discourses by Finnish parties and politicians related to instrumentalized migration from 2021 to 2024, focusing on parliamentary debates and party policy documents. The study demonstrates how migration and migrants became a national security issue through four main securitizing discourses: sovereignty, national protector, dangerous migrants, and transnational insecurities. It also reveals how the processes of securitization and othering are aligned and suggests a more inclusive approach to instrumentalization to reduce the effectiveness of hybrid operations. The contribution of the paper aligns closely with the IMISCOE Spring Conference themes,

as it critically examines how migration governance is shaped by the increasingly illiberal political climate in Europe. It sheds light on how partisan actors use securitizing narratives to advance restrictive policies and how such framings impact democratic norms, public attitudes, and social cohesion. The paper's originality lies in its empirical focus on Finland, a country typically seen as a liberal and rule-based democracy, and the theoretical synthesis of securitization and othering. By analyzing how state responses to hybrid threats contribute to the erosion of inclusive policy frameworks, the paper offers novel insights into the political instrumentalization of migration in Europe.

4. *Ambivalent liberalism? Civic Platform's migration discourse in the light of issue ownership theory*
Marcin Kosman (Vizja University)

Abstract: This paper presents preliminary findings from the postdoctoral project "The Discursive Construction of Migration and Security. The Perspective of Poland in a Cross-European Dimension", partly conducted at the University of Antwerp. It examines how Poland's largest liberal party, Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska, PO), has framed migration and security since taking power in December 2023. While most research has focused on the conservative Law and Justice party (governed Poland from 2015 to 2023), which securitised migration and portrayed migrants as threats to Europe, PO's discourse remains underexplored. Using qualitative discourse analysis informed by issue ownership theory, the study investigates how PO claims, redefines, or contests migration issues in a polarised political environment. It analyses party documents as well as speeches and interviews by the party's key figures (Prime Minister Donald Tusk, 2025 presidential candidate Rafał Trzaskowski, former Justice Minister Adam Bodnar). The focus includes the Belarusian border crisis, the presence of millions of Ukrainian refugees, and EU relocation debates. Findings reveal tensions: while PO often criticises right-wing securitisation, it has also adopted exclusionary frames, particularly during campaigns, portraying migrants in stereotypical or instrumental terms. These patterns illustrate the challenge of balancing solidarity with perceived security needs. Beyond Poland, the study contributes to debates on how liberal actors engage with migration in contentious times. It also shows how such parties attempt to claim topics (security and border control) traditionally associated with right-wing formations. Finally, the paper provides a novel context to study how a traditionally emigration-oriented society negotiates new migration challenges.

5. *Still exceptional in Europe: Migration attitudes in Spain after the irruption of VOX*

Sebastian Rinken (Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas)

Abstract: Radical-right parties (RRPs) tend to employ anti-immigration rhetoric for electoral gain; such rhetoric is generally supposed to mobilize latent demand for unwelcoming or outright hostile positions. Throughout the past decade, this vicious circle has conditioned the dynamics of political competition across Europe. Until 2018, Spain was one of just a handful of European countries without parliamentary representation of RRPs. This has changed decisively: VOX currently polls at close to one-fifth of the vote nationwide. However, the above-mentioned pattern appears not to apply to Spain, at least for the time being: if there is a VOX effect on migration attitudes, extant surveys suggest it defies conventional wisdom. Despite VOX' attempts to instrumentalize large numbers of irregular migrants intercepted at Spain's maritime border, issue salience has failed to surge, according to data collected by CIS, a public polling outfit. And according to data provided by the European Social Survey, the prevalence of anti-immigrant sentiment among Spaniards with rightist political ideology has remained stable at around 35% throughout the past decade, contrasting with rising proportions in countries such as Germany, Italy, or Hungary. More surprisingly still, the share of leftist Spaniards voicing such misgivings about immigration has decreased clearly throughout the same period. Based on research conducted in the framework of MAPP ("Measuring Anti-Immigrant Sentiment: Prevalence & Predictors", a study funded by Spanish I+D+i grant PID2023-149034OB-I00), this paper analyses the mobilization dynamics of migration attitudes in Spain from a comparative perspective.

PANEL 10 (ON-SITE, Building L5, Ground floor, Room 0/3):

VOLUNTEERING AND (CONTESTED) SOLIDARITIES IN POLARIZED TIMES

Chair: Alison Diec (University of Liège)

Discussant: Mickaël Idrac (University of Liège)

1. *Civic engagement in contentious times: The ambivalent role of volunteering in the governance of refugee reception in Italy*

Paola Bonizzoni (University of Milan)

Abstract: This paper explores the role of emerging forms of civic engagement in the governance of refugee reception in Italy, by comparatively examining volunteering in government-run facilities, community initiatives like buddy schemes and family-hosting, support in border and transit areas, and voluntary guardianship for unaccompanied minors. Findings reveal the ambivalent role of volunteers in contentious times and contexts. On one hand, citizen engagement is increasingly celebrated in public discourse and integrated into institutional, professionalized settings. The involvement of "ordinary people" fosters relational networks that challenge dominant stereotypes and counter anti-migrant narratives. Non-professional actors bring unique resources and approaches, address service gaps and funding cuts, support individuals framed as "undeserving," and contribute to social cohesion by swiftly responding to or preventing emergencies. On the other hand, volunteers can also represent a contentious force by monitoring access to rights and services, reaffirming public responsibility, and pressing institutions for improved provision. Such actions sometimes provoke criticism, criminalization, or co-optation attempts, especially when linked to public authorities or contracted third-sector providers. By situating these dynamics within broader debates on volunteering's political and social role, the paper offers a critical perspective on how these practices are organized, regulated, and experienced amid political contention. It highlights how this ambivalence generates tensions and opportunities for negotiation, contributing to a deeper understanding of migration governance in polarized contexts.

2. *Contested solidarities: Exploring refugee support across Greek border zones*

Dimitrios Sfondylis (University of Macedonia)

Abstract: This doctoral research investigates the conditions under which civic solidarity toward refugees emerges across Greece's border regions, focusing on three Aegean islands and the Evros land border. Amid rising polarization and securitized migration governance, the study asks which ideological, moral, and emotional drivers shape pro-refugee collective action. How do dominant public discourses—particularly the "invasion" narrative during the Evros standoff in March 2020—shape citizens' perceptions, motivations, and engagement in solidarity practices? To answer these questions, the project employs a mixed-methods design combining a large-scale survey with focus groups and critical discourse analysis. The survey (probability-based sampling across sites) measures political orientation, moral foundations, perceived symbolic and realistic threats, collective efficacy, historical memory, and self-reported solidarity (e.g., volunteering, advocacy, material support). Respondents involved in refugee support are then invited to focus groups, probing personal motivations, ideological frames, and local narratives. In parallel, a critical discourse analysis of political rhetoric, media, and institutional statements examines how dominant narratives condition public attitudes and civic agency. Drawing on social and political psychology and migration studies, the study offers an interdisciplinary lens—and a border-comparative focus—on solidarity in contentious times. By comparing distinct geopolitical and symbolic borders, it shows how support for refugees varies across space and interacts with governance, identity, and threat. With data collection scheduled for early 2026, the presentation will center on research design, measurement strategy, and contributions, inviting targeted feedback and situating the study within debates on resistance, humanitarianism, and politics of belonging in illiberal contexts.

3. *Catholic responses to migration as a site of polarisation in Western and Eastern Europe*

Névyne Zeineldin (University of Liège); Katarína Cséfalvayová (Institute for Central Europe); Clarissa Tabosa (Comenius University)

Abstract: Despite the prominence of religion in public debates on migration, Catholic perspectives remain understudied, particularly in Eastern Europe. This paper offers comparative evidence from Catholic contexts in both Eastern and Western Europe. Drawing on original data -focus groups, surveys, and qualitative interviews- it examines how faith communities mediate migration debates in an era of polarisation. The findings reveal a broad consensus in favour of welcoming refugees in principle, yet solidarity remains fragmented in practice. Both lay Catholics and clergy reproduce a hierarchy of deservingness: compassion is more readily extended to those perceived as victims of persecution or culturally proximate, while migrants associated with economic motives or long-term settlement generate greater ambivalence. This selective framing exposes how faith-based ethics interact with political logics of inclusion and exclusion. The study also highlights internal debates within the Church. While clergy articulate theological imperatives of hospitality, they simultaneously face organisational constraints,

shifting state policies, and the risk of politicisation. Many describe their engagement as a spiritual duty but also as a source of emotional fatigue, disillusionment, or self-censorship. At the community level, lay Catholics mirror wider societal divisions. They are neither passive recipients of doctrine nor simple reflectors of partisan polarisation; rather, they negotiate complex moral and civic positions, often oscillating between openness and restraint. By situating Catholic responses within local political cultures and transnational hierarchies of deservingness, the paper emphasises the ambivalent role of religion in Europe today: a site where identity, belonging, and migration are continuously renegotiated under contentious conditions.

4. *Political discouragement and on-the-ground support for migrants: Volunteering practices amid tightening return and deportation policies in Europe*

Karliën Strijbosch (Maastricht University)

Abstract: In Spring 2025, the Dutch Minister for Asylum and Migration, Marjolein Faber refused to endorse the royal award for five volunteers who had been working with the organization responsible for receiving asylum seekers in the Netherlands. The minister argued that their efforts conflicted with her strict asylum policy, which aims to reduce the number of asylum seekers entering the country and to limit the issuance of residence permits. This stance assumes that volunteers inherently support migrants and asylum seekers in their efforts to arrive and remain. However, research (Kalir & Wissink, 2016; Schapendonk et al., 2025) has shown that, particularly in the context of return and deportation, convergences may exist between the state, civil society organizations, and other actors. This paper further investigates the role of non-state actors in relation to migration policies by examining the case of German female volunteers who mainly engaged with Senegalese men during processes of deportation and return. Drawing on a year of ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2019 and 2025, primarily in Senegal with additional research in Germany, this article argues that volunteers navigate the multidirectional circulation of mistrust and frustration among returnees, institutions, and donors within the return migration industry. The paper furthermore explore how volunteers may at times actively resist return and deportation efforts, at other moments they may, consciously or unconsciously, facilitate the implementation of return and deportation policies.

5. *Between contamination and institutionalization: Voluntary relationships of care throughout and beyond crises*

Eugenia Blasetti (University of Parma); Michela Semprebon (University of Parma); Paola Bonizzoni (University of Milan)

Abstract: From the Arab Spring to the Syrian civil war, the 2015 humanitarian crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the invasion of Ukraine, repeated crises have profoundly reshaped migration flows and borders, triggering humanitarian emergencies and prompting widespread civil society mobilization across Europe. While some of these initiatives emerged in response to specific crises and later faded away, others have survived and evolved over time, continuing to promote inclusion while both compensating for and challenging exclusionary welfare policies. Though often rooted in grassroots action, many of these initiatives have experienced processes of institutionalization and have increasingly intersected with formal reception and welfare systems, raising questions about their potential for innovation and shifting political significance. Drawing on a rich dataset of over 160 semi-structured interviews with volunteers and professionals conducted between 2018 and 2025, and also thanks to the funding of the VoLacross project by the Italian Ministry of Research, this paper identifies five emerging forms of volunteering that developed during and after these crises: volunteering within reception facilities, family hosting and community mentoring (“buddy schemes”), guardianship of unaccompanied minors, and volunteering in transit and border zones. While exploring both positive (e.g., development of care networks, advocacy on migrant rights) and critical aspects (e.g., asymmetrical relationships, paternalistic approaches, privatization and legitimization of welfare disinvestment), this research examines why and how these forms of volunteering have emerged and later either consolidated or faded away over time, as a result of processes of contamination and institutionalization.

PANEL 11 (ON-SITE, Building L5, Floor 2, Room 2/5):

CIVIL SOCIETY, COMMUNITY ACTORS, AND MIGRATION GOVERNANCE IN CONTENTIOUS TIMES

Chair: Ismail Oubad (University of Liège)

Discussant: Parvati Raghuram (Open University)

1. *'Every day is a war': Examining and learning from the impacts of the UK and US governments' harsh immigration approaches on migrant inclusion/integration practitioners and their work during the Brexit and first Trump eras*

Beth A. Katz (University of Connecticut)

Abstract: My research responds to the conference question interrogating to what extent civil society organizations and other actors involved with migrant inclusion/integration work adjust their engagement within times of heightened contention. I analysed qualitative and quantitative survey data that I collected from migrant inclusion practitioners operating in the UK and the US during the Brexit and first Trump eras (2017-2020). I then synthesized this with analysis of relevant historical documents and scholarship. I found that the UK and the US Government's immigration approaches during the Brexit and first Trump era produced three conditions that significantly impacted migrant inclusion practitioners and their work: 1) increased demand for migrant inclusion work; 2) substantial reductions to public funding and state capacity for migrant inclusion work; 3) more extreme reactions by politicians and the public towards migrant inclusion practitioners and their efforts. Both immediate and long-term impacts on individual practitioners and on the field were observed as a result of these harsh government approaches. My research yields insights about the effects that operating in extremely unwelcoming immigration environments take on practitioners and the field as well as strategies used by these actors for navigating, adapting, and, in some cases, thriving in contested spaces. This is an under-researched but vital topic. These findings also support research by Emilsson (2015) and Coker (2018) that identify a 'national turn' in local governance of immigration whereby national governments are exercising greater control and influence at subnational levels, complicating efforts at these levels to enact their own integration policies.

2. *Migration governance in contentious times: The case of Community Sponsorship*

Mieke Schrooten (Odisee University of Applied Sciences); Sylvie Van Dam (Odisee University of Applied Sciences)

Abstract: Across Europe, migration governance is increasingly shaped by ideological polarization and the politicisation of migration. In this context, civil society actors continue to play a vital role in supporting migrants and refugees, often through grassroots initiatives such as Community Sponsorship (CS), a public-private partnership model involving governments and private or community actors in refugee reception and settlement. Since 2024, the AMIF-funded RISE project (Reinforcing Integration through Sponsorship Enhancement) has explored CS practices in Belgium, Italy, and Lithuania, with a particular focus on housing challenges. Drawing on 950 survey responses, interviews, and focus groups and pilot initiatives, our research shows that while CS fosters inclusion and solidarity, its implementation is highly sensitive to national political climates. In Belgium, for example, the recent federal decision to halt the resettlement programme – on which CS is based – marks a significant shift in migration governance. Framed within a broader political competition to enforce the strictest asylum and migration policies, this move undermines evidence-based policymaking and threatens the future of CS. Similar tendencies are visible elsewhere in Europe. Our findings speak directly to the concern with how migration governance is being reshaped in contentious times. CS illustrates both the potential of civil society to offer inclusive alternatives and the vulnerability of such initiatives to shifting political agendas. Building on this case, this paper examines how civil society and migrants recalibrate their engagement in migration policy debates and how public preferences and institutional responses evolve under pressure.

3. *A decolonial perspective on the consequences of the closure of the USAID program for civil society organizations supporting migrants and refugees in Central and Eastern Europe: The case of Poland*

Katarzyna Kubin (University of Warsaw)

Abstract: In January 2025, the newly sworn-in President of the United States, Donald Trump, announced the suspension of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) program. Media attention focused primarily on how the USAID closure affects countries and communities in the global South, but the President's decision also impacts on Central and Eastern Europe. In the proposed presentation, we take a decolonial perspective that considers how media narratives about USAID funding cuts omitted the region, thus upholding its status in global colonial systems of power as a "white spot" (Cavanagh 2003, 2004) or a "missing second world" (Grzechnik 2019), which also disenables a critical view onto how dynamics of coloniality play out in the region in particular ways. We locate the region on the map of USAID cuts and, based on the case of Poland, offer a preliminary diagnosis of the situation of civil

society organizations (CSO's) in Poland, including migrant-led organizations, and how they have been affected by the suspension of USAID funding. We discuss how local CSO responses to the cuts are informed by power dynamics of race, gender and sexuality, and how those responses affected the situation of at-risk populations, such as refugees from Ukraine. Our analysis is based on 20 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with representatives of local CSO's in Poland, collected between September and December 2025. The presentation will contribute to the IMISCOE Spring Conference with insights into how migration governance is shaped by the current contentious political context and its impact on migrants and migrant-focused CSO's.

4. *Refugee resettlement: Community organizations and integration in Alberta, Canada from 2015-2024*
Eylul Ozmen (Leuphana University of Lüneburg)

Abstract: In contentious times marked by the politicization of migration and tightening resources, how do local civil society actors govern integration in practice? This paper examines community organizations in Alberta, Canada, as policy interpreters and de facto policymakers in refugee resettlement between 2015 and 2024. Drawing on a structured survey with three major service providers, CCIS, TIES, and MCA, which were complemented by documentary analysis, the study examines how housing, employment, education, language acquisition, and mental health services are adapted to shifting federal and provincial directives and public sentiment. The analysis examines how frontline discretion, interorganizational coordination, and advocacy transform high-level policy into local rules and routines, shaping access and outcomes for newcomers. Findings show that organizations reallocate scarce resources, sequence services, and pilot innovations that fill governance gaps, for example, by bridging housing bottlenecks through landlord partnerships, aligning language training with employer needs, and embedding mental health supports into settlement pathways. These practices recalibrate policy goals on the ground, influence governmental funding priorities, and feed back into public debates. The paper contributes to scholarship on migration governance by centring civil society as an arena of policy production, not only implementation, and by specifying the mechanisms through which contentious politics filter into everyday integration work. The Alberta case offers transferable insights for jurisdictions that rely on mixed delivery systems, showing how community organizations mediate between state objectives and migrant experiences, with implications for accountability, equity, and resilience.

5. *Diaspora representative claims before EU institutions: New trends in troubled times*
Claire Vincent-Mory (University of Liège)

Abstract: Today, a growing number of Diaspora Organisations (DOs) claim to represent European citizens and residents with migrant backgrounds before institutional and political bodies. They aim to increase visibility, participate in supranational dialogues and influence policymaking. Yet, they operate within a complex multilevel political opportunity structure. While the EU supports diaspora engagement, in line with international paradigms of inclusion and whole-of-society approaches, radical right actors, restrictive migration policies and xenophobic sentiments are simultaneously gaining ground at national and local levels. This raises the question of how such contradictory signals shape diaspora claims for representation in Europe. This communication presents the first results of the DIASPOREP-EU project. At the intersection of diaspora studies and non-elective representation studies, it relies on a mixed-method approach and original data collection, and carries out descriptive statistics on hundreds of DOs, corpus-based text-content analysis, interviews and participant observation. Initial findings highlight the growing heterogeneity of DO representatives, in mission statements, activities and membership requirements. They suggest a modest trend towards inclusivity while confirming the decisive role of supportive national policies and instruments. Two historically dominant categories of claims remain central: civic and political rights, and cross-border development cooperation. At the same time, results reveal a widening divergence in claim-framing strategies. A minority of organisations adopt radical anti-racist and decolonial perspectives, building contentious forms of representation. In contrast, most align with global narratives and seek to engage EU institutions as allies, perceiving them as buffers against increasingly hostile national and local contexts.

PANEL 12 (ON-SITE, Building L3, Ground floor, Room 0/51):

RETHINKING THE POLITICS OF PROVISION: INTERMEDIARIES AND STREET-LEVEL BUREAUCRACY

Chair: Katharina Klaunig (University of North Carolina)

1. *Meso-level geoarbitrage and the role of intermediaries in shaping Chinese migration to Portugal* Sofia Gaspar (CIES-Iscte)

Abstract: This paper examines the practice of geoarbitrage as enacted by mid-level private actors—specifically migration consultants and related intermediaries—who facilitate access to Portugal’s Golden Visa programme for aspiring Chinese migrants. Drawing on expert interviews and a content analysis of both migration policy documents and online promotional materials, we explore how these actors strategically construct and disseminate narratives that enhance Portugal’s appeal as a mobility destination. These intermediaries do not merely provide logistical support; they actively shape perceptions of Portugal’s socio-political and economic landscape, tailoring their messaging to resonate with the aspirations and anxieties of relatively affluent Chinese clients. While geoarbitrage has traditionally been conceptualised at the micro-level, focusing on individual decisions to relocate in pursuit of economic or lifestyle advantages, we extend the concept to highlight the pivotal role of meso-level actors—those who operate between individual migrants and the broader legal and policy frameworks that regulate global mobility. These intermediaries function as “geoarbiters,” mediating between personal aspirations and structural constraints, and thereby influencing not only who moves, but how and why they move. By foregrounding the role of these meso-level actors in the geoarbitrage dynamics between China and Portugal, we aim to illuminate the mechanisms through which Portugal maintains its image as a desirable destination for wealthy Asian migrants. This analysis also allows us to interrogate the implications of such mediated desirability for migration policy, particularly in terms of equity, transparency, and the commodification of residency rights.

2. *Strategic ambiguity in migration policy change: From political compromise to street-level contestation* Andreas Asplén Lundstedt (University of Gothenburg); Andrea Spehar (University of Gothenburg)

Abstract: This article introduces the concept of strategic ambiguity as a theoretical lens for understanding migration policy change. It builds on research which shows that in areas marked by political contestation and normative uncertainty — such as migration — policymaking often becomes symbolic, designed to signal action rather than achieve stated goals. The strategic use of ambiguity allows policymakers to rely on deliberate vagueness and interpretive openness to navigate between competing pressures, facilitating political compromise and pleasing voters. Ambiguity, however, can generate problems in implementation: inconsistent legal application, unchecked discretion and uncertainty for migrants. Ambiguity thus opens new and unexpected avenues for street-level bureaucrats and public servants in translating policy into practice. Empirically, the paper analyses the introduction and implementation of access to health care for undocumented migrants in Sweden during 2010–2025. A highly contested issue, we focus on core elements of the policy: who should qualify as a patient, and what healthcare they should be able to access, issues which were left open to reach a political compromise. The analysis shows how health care professionals and unions have harnessed the discretionary authority and resisted subsequent attempts at governing the implementation of the law. These contestations can be understood as struggles between political and medical frames of classification, illustrating how strategic ambiguity not only facilitates political compromise but also reshapes the scope of discretion at the street level, with significant consequences for migrants’ rights and access to services.

3. *The politics of provision: Dehumanisation and food practices in Greek refugee hotspot islands* Edurne Bartolomé Peral (University of Deusto); Rita Lambert (University College London)

Abstract: Since 2015, Europe has faced significant arrivals of asylum-seekers escaping conflicts, prosecution and economic instability. European policies in turn have adopted increasingly carceral approaches accompanied by changing framings of ‘the crisis’ from humanitarian to security ones. In a context of growing securitisation, processes of dehumanisation emerge and take place- from individual socio/political-psychological perspective, to discursive, mediatic and policy framing- triggering nationalism and discrimination. This paper examines the mechanisms of dehumanisation and their immediate and wider impacts. Focusing on food access in the context of contained displaced populations, this paper analyses how dehumanisation manifests in food aid-related practices and institutional mechanisms, and with what social and environmental consequences. It seeks to answer the following research questions: How do dehumanising strategies operate in relation to the daily practice of food delivery and consumption in refugee camps? What counteracting re-humanising strategies exist in host communities, (grassroot organizations, solidarians)? What are the immediate and wider impacts of these

practices? Drawing on three research projects conducted between 2020 and 2025 on the Aegean refugee hotspot islands, this paper looks at how the increasingly carceral approach to migration and unjust food practices have gone hand in hand and led to wider consequences. Moreover, this paper seeks to develop a better framing of 'just' food system in the context of migration and develop a more holistic approach to food security that integrates justice and sustainability, for rethinking food aid policies and practices.

4. *Lawful loyalty: Reinterpreting bureaucratic practices in Belgian asylum administrations*

Claire Lefort-Rieu (University of Liège)

Abstract: In contentious times regarding migration governance, this paper explores how civil servants in Belgian asylum administrations remain within the institution while navigating political directives. Based on ongoing ethnographic fieldwork at Fedasil and interviews with staff at the Aliens Office and the Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons, the study examines how bureaucrats mobilize law as a resource when implementing policies with which they may not fully agree. Following Hirschman's framework, I argue for a reconceptualization of loyalty as a legal practice: rather than leaving the institution (exit) or openly protesting (voice), some officials draw on legal norms, procedures, and jurisprudence as part of their everyday work. This lawful loyalty reflects an active commitment to the institution's normative foundations, expressed through careful engagement with the legal framework. The analysis shows how civil servants' daily practices and understanding of their mission are ways in which they navigate political constraints. Their practices point to ambivalent modalities of bureaucratic action that cannot be reduced to either obedience or resistance, and which go beyond the idea of discretion. By reinterpreting loyalty through the prism of legal practices, this paper contributes to the refinement of Hirschman's framework and to the anthropology of migration governance. It highlights how law becomes a key medium through which bureaucratic commitment and professional ethos are articulated in politically contentious contexts.

5. *Contesting disintegration from within. Infra-political contestation by former newcomers as social professionals in integration regimes*

Mieke Groeninck (Odisee & KU Leuven); Pascal Debruyne (Odisee University College); Dirk Geldof (University of Antwerp & Odisee Centre for Family Studies)

Abstract: This paper examines the role of 'referrers in diversity' - municipally employed or externally contracted experts by experience who guide newcomers through Belgium's complex welfare and service landscape - within the Flemish integration regime. Drawing on interviews and participant observations with seven referrers, their colleagues, and the families they assisted in 2022–2023 (as part of the broader REFUFAM research), we explore how these experts by experience navigate the tension between facilitating access to rights for refugee families in Belgium, while simultaneously acting from within a specific Flemish integration dispositive (Foucault 2004), whose increasingly stringent and contentious directionality effectively causes disintegration for depicted 'others' (Collyer et al. 2020). We first provide a genealogy of the Flemish integration regime as a dispositive within the contours of the Belgian federal state and the development of Flemish Citizenship. Afterwards, we demonstrate how referrers contest three governmental rationales underlying the integration regime, thereby demonstrating a form of infra-politics (Scott 1985, 1990) against various bordering practices of disintegration (Collyer et al. 2020) and differential inclusion (Könönen 2018). These rationales are informed by: a presumed need for integrating 'apt Muslimness'; an individualization of responsibility for 'integration' through language acquisition; and the multiscalar compartmentalization of 'integration policies'. By tracing these ambivalent dynamics, the article contributes to debates on migrant agency and/in integration regimes, and the ambiguous tensions between integration and disintegration.

PANEL 13 (ONLINE):

THE POLITICS AND EXPERIENCES OF LABOR MOBILITIES

Chair: Catarina Sampaio (Universidade Aberta)

Discussant: Francesca Biondi Dal Monte (Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies)

1. *Digital statecraft in transnational labor governance: The politics of platform interoperability in Indonesia-Saudi Arabia migrant governance*

Anggy Wira Pambudi (Universitas Singaperbangsa Karawang & Universitas Padjajaran)

Abstract: This study critically examines the digital transformation of labor governance between Indonesia and Saudi Arabia through the use of SIAPkerja and Musaned platforms. The platforms represent a state-driven response to the structural problems of the Kafala system, particularly in addressing the lack of transparency, accountability, and protection problems for Indonesian domestic workers. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the study analyzes how platforms mediate stakeholder relations and reshape governance dynamics. The findings highlight both technical and diplomatic implications, including the need for cross-border system interoperability and institutional oversight. The study contributes to the literature on transnational labor governance and digital statecraft by positioning digital platforms as instruments of diplomacy. The study offers critical insight into the evolving architecture of worker protection in the digital age.

2. *Life under occupation: The challenges facing women business leaders in the West Bank*

Christina Bache (Vrije Universiteit Brussel)

Abstract: This paper explores how women business leaders in the West Bank navigate structural, political, and social obstacles amid prolonged Israeli occupation. The main question is: What specific barriers do women entrepreneurs and business leaders encounter, and how do these challenges influence their economic agency, resilience, and contributions to peace and justice? The study uses a qualitative approach, based on semi-structured interviews with women entrepreneurs, business association representatives, and civil society actors who are based in, from, or have worked in the West Bank. Additional desk research on gender, private sector engagement, and economic development supports individual experiences within broader political and institutional settings. Findings reveal that women business leaders confront many restrictions stemming from the occupation (checkpoints, mobility limits, market fragmentation), entrenched patriarchal norms, limited access to networks and finance, and weak institutional support structures. Despite these constraints, women business leaders have often adopted specific strategies, such as cross-border digital trade, informal networks for solidarity, and social enterprise models to try to overcome them. Yet, without systemic change, their potential to drive inclusive development and bolster their economic security remains limited. The paper contributes to debates on SDG 16 by highlighting how occupation-linked structural violence undermines gender equality and equitable economic participation. It underscores the importance of transformative policy frameworks and international partnerships that recognize women entrepreneurs not only as economic actors but also as agents of peace and justice.

3. *Strategic inaction of sending states: Turkey and the comparative politics of physician emigration*

Eren Karaca (Middle East Technical University)

Abstract: This paper investigates how sending states respond—or fail to respond—to the international migration of health professionals, using the case of Turkey as a starting point. While migration policy is often associated with receiving countries and securitized borders, this study shifts the lens toward the governance strategies (or absences thereof) in countries of origin. In Turkey, physician emigration has sharply increased in recent years, yet the state has not developed any comprehensive monitoring or policy response. Instead, government officials have publicly downplayed the trend, with President Erdoğan famously stating, “Let them go if they want to.” This paper conceptualizes such institutional silence as a “strategy of inaction”, arguing that ignoring out-migration constitutes a distinct governance model—one that is political in nature and deserves comparative scrutiny. By comparing Turkey’s passive approach with the Philippines’ promotive labor export model and India’s fragmented but facilitative hybrid stance, the paper aims to illustrate diverging state logics in the governance of physician emigration. The comparison also underscores how “strategic inaction” may be an understudied yet influential mode of statecraft, particularly in migration contexts. While this project focuses on three cases, the category of strategic inaction may help illuminate underdocumented middle-income countries where institutional silence obscures real outflows. In doing so, the paper contributes to migration governance literature by foregrounding state absence—not merely as a gap, but as a political position within global health labor mobility.

4. *Migrant entrepreneurship and the sociology of ignorance in illiberal times*

Alexandra David (Westphalian University); Judith Terstriep (Westphalian University); Jörg Freiling (University of Bremen)

Abstract: In line with the 2026 IMISCOE Spring Conference, this paper explores how politically contentious times shape both migration governance and public perceptions of migrant contributions.

While right-wing narratives depict migrants as burdens or threats, their actual impact is often ignored. A key domain where this selective visibility becomes evident is migrant entrepreneurship. Despite decades of research (e.g., Kloosterman et al., 2019; Villares-Varela & Ram, 2015), migrant entrepreneurs remain caught between two discursive poles: invisibilised when successful (e.g., in biotech/tech) (Terstriep et al., 2024) and stereotyped when active in sectors like food services. These framings serve political purposes, helping to justify the lack of public support while avoiding potential backlash among populist voters. This paper mobilises the sociology of ignorance (McGoey, 2014; Mueller, 2018) to analyse how structured non-knowledge is produced about the diversity and potential of migrant-founded businesses. Drawing on empirical material from 3 German urban ecosystems – including 71 interviews with migrant entrepreneurs of first and second generation – it examines how this recognition gap affects entrepreneurial trajectories and fosters withdrawal into community-bound networks and ethnic niches. At the same time, drawing on Foucault’s concept of subjectivation, the paper rejects a solely victimising view. Migrant entrepreneurs actively negotiate their position within exclusionary structures through adaptation, compliance, and innovation. As neither fully included nor excluded (Neumeyer et al., 2018), they create spaces of agency and resilience (David & Terstriep, 2024). They contribute to urban economic life while subtly challenging dominant narratives of belonging, merit, and success (David et al., 2025).

PANEL 14 (ONLINE):

BETWEEN HARM AND HELP: VIOLENCE, CARE, AND COMMUNITY RESPONSE

Chair: Emmanuel Uchenna Chidozie (Catholic University of Leuven)

Discussant: Jérémy Mandin (University of Liège)

1. *Countering violence through migrant-led community networks in Northern Ireland*

Amanda Lubit (Dublin City University)

Abstract: Labelled the “race-hate capital of Europe” twenty years ago, Northern Ireland has a long history of ignoring, tolerating and rationalizing racist violence as a consequence of the region’s complex history with sectarianism and paramilitaries. This has proved fertile territory for the rise of a far-right anti-immigrant movement. The past two summers have seen intensive periods of anti-immigrant violence with assaults, arson, petrol bombs, and pogroms. In August 2024, a mob marched through Belfast destroying migrant-owned businesses while police watched, failing to act. In June 2025 masked men violently forced families out of their homes in the middle of the night, then located and burned down their temporary shelter several nights later. Local politicians, police and other authorities have failed to take meaningful action to address the rising violence. This presentation will focus upon four new initiatives created by migrant community organization to protect themselves. First, they created protection networks where a phone message goes out to migrants and supporters when violence is anticipated. In 2024 average men and women stood guard outside threatened businesses to prevent attacks. Second, in 2025 they created a system for anticipating and tracking threats since the police were not doing so successfully. Third, they formed coalitions with other organisations (e.g. trade unions, tenants unions, LGBTQ+ groups, and women’s groups) with the shared goals of improving rights and protections. Fourth, they are building relationships between neighbors through community kitchens where locals and migrants eat together and identify shared struggles.

2. *Violence enacted: How the men’s wing in a refugee accommodation became an accepted site of violence*

Sifka Etlar Frederiksen (Leuphana University Lüneburg)

Abstract: This paper explores how the men’s wing of a refugee accommodation in Germany became both unsafe and an accepted site of violence. To do so, it draws on 21 interviews with staff, service providers and asylum seekers conducted with a multilingual research team. Using this interview data, I examine everyday practices and in-situ meaning-making around the men’s wing, where single men over 18 were housed in six-person-rooms for up to 24 months. I argue that since ‘vulnerability’ is a guiding concept for migration management, policies on violence protection and integration often prioritise female vulnerabilities while neglecting those of men, who are mostly framed as risky or dangerous subjects. The analysis shows that overcrowded, cramped spaces without privacy, combined with past trauma fostered violence that the staff at the same time took for granted and perceived as unavoidable. I argue that the neglectful institution—with its open internal boundaries within the closed external borders of the refugee accommodation—produced a profound sense of vulnerability through the

enactment of slow violence. In this process, the men's wing was enacted as a space where violence became normalised, depoliticised and treated as inevitable. Thus, the asylum policy regime creates humanitarian Others, rendering violence against some acceptable. With these findings, this paper contributes to the conference's exploration of how the experiences of being a refugee is shaped by contentious contexts with a focus on the vulnerabilities of men, a group that is often overlooked in research on victims of violence in asylum contexts.

3. *Food beyond nutrition: Institutional, social, and structural dimensions of privatised hotel accommodation for Refugee Asylum Seeker health and wellbeing*

Emily Hiro Naish (Queen Mary University London)

Abstract: Two decades of restrictive policies aimed at creating a substandard asylum welfare system have created an unprecedented accommodation crisis in the UK. A history of privatisation and fragmentation, compounded by international migration patterns, has produced a system of shortage, inadequacy, and inefficiency. Hotels, initially intended as emergency overflow spaces, now house a significant proportion of RAS, with reported stays of up to three years. Framed as temporary and humanitarian, these settings have evolved into sites of structural neglect, poor health, and control. This study extends the existing evidence of the hotels' detrimental impact on mental health by centring on food, a topic that has frequently been highlighted by RAS living in hotels. Drawing on focus group data with 22 RAS in London, it examines how hotel food provision harms physical health, psychosocial wellbeing, and autonomy. This study presents the first in-depth analysis of the psychosocial harms associated with food provision in UK asylum hotels, adopting a systems-wide approach that uniquely integrates structural, institutional, and social dimensions. Such analysis is critical given food's role in identity, placemaking, and enabling agency after forced displacement. Findings reveal that the hotel food system is profoundly dehumanising, characterised by poor nutrition, cultural erasure, and rigid controls that eliminate choice. Privatisation entrenches a lack of accountability, enabling systemic resistance to change. This paper argues that food provision in asylum hotels operates as a visible manifestation of restrictive migration policies, embedding deterrence and destitution into daily life while eroding autonomy and constraining opportunities for resistance or change.

4. *Residential violence and socio-spatial care responses in trans migratory trajectories in Brussels*

Ansaio Totolehibe (Université catholique de Louvain)

Abstract: This paper analyses the impact of current contentious times on the residential trajectories of transgender and racialised migrants in the Brussels-Capital Region. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork based on in-home interviews and co-produced cartographies with participants, it introduces the notion of residential violence to qualify experiences tied to dwelling. The proposed typology includes: institutional and administrative violence (exclusions from shelters, discrimination in social housing allocation, domiciliation controls), relational violence (rejections and exploitations in shared housing, neighbourhood tensions), and intimate/psychic violence (isolation within confined domestic spaces, identity insecurity linked to housing). In response, trans migrants develop socio-spatial care practices, analysed here in their material dimension (Hirata, 2016) and emotional dimension (Nash, 2019). These include avoiding specific housing options or districts perceived as hostile, building networks to secure rooms or flats, and creating domestic spaces of collective support. Through co-produced drawings, these responses reveal situated knowledges (Collins, 1990) and alternative forms of organising dwelling. The paper further examines how migration and housing policies, shaped by polarising populist discourses, directly influence these residential experiences (Martiniello & Rea, 2014). In turn, it discusses how trans migrants' care responses produce counter-narratives, resonating with Brah's (1996) work on diaspora and space, Anzaldúa's (1987) theorisation of borders, and El-Tayeb's (2011) analyses of racialised queer subjectivities in Europe. Finally, it engages with Puar (2007) to interrogate how dominant European discourses configure both violence and resistance in trans migratory trajectories.

PANEL 15 (ONLINE):

BELONGING UNDER PRESSURE: MIGRANTS NAVIGATING CONTENTIOUS TIMES AND SPACES

Chair: Isabella Miano (University of Catania)

Discussant: Alice Clarebout (University of Liège)

1. *Neoliberal conditionality of solidarity: BN(O) migrants and the paradox of inclusion in Britain's contentious migration politics*

Sum Kung (Kingston College)

Abstract: This paper examines how migration politics in today's illiberal times are mediated not only by states and far-right actors but also by migrants themselves. Focusing on Hong Kong migrants arriving in Britain under the British National (Overseas) [BN(O)] visa scheme, the study explores how neoliberal values—self-reliance, meritocracy, and rule compliance—internalised in Hong Kong shape their responses to contentious migration debates in the UK. While populist and radical right parties instrumentalise legality to draw exclusionary boundaries, BN(O) migrants' emphasis on procedural fairness and “deservingness” risks converging with these logics, even as they distance themselves from overt xenophobia. Conceptually, the paper advances the notion of neoliberal conditionality of solidarity to capture how migrant support for diversity becomes contingent on market rationality and legality, rather than universalist ethics of inclusion. This reframes dominant binaries of “pro-” versus “anti-migrant” actors by showing how migrants themselves may reproduce hierarchies of legitimacy, complicating the politics of belonging. Methodologically, the paper employs a novel interdisciplinary approach, bridging migration studies, postcolonial critique, and the sociology of neoliberalism, while applying legal, institutional, and cultural analysis to the BN(O) case. By situating BN(O) Hongkongers within Britain's polarised migration landscape, the study speaks directly to the conference theme: it reveals how contentious times shape migrant subjectivities, while highlighting migrants' ambivalent role in reinforcing or contesting exclusionary politics. In doing so, it contributes fresh conceptual and methodological insights to debates on migration governance, migrant agency, and the moral economy of inclusion in an era of intensified ideological polarisation.

2. *Homemaking in contentious times: The performance of homeplace in the hostile environment*

Hannah Wainwright (University of Leeds)

Abstract: The summer of 2025, like the one before it, was marked by protests outside asylum hotels across the UK. Fuelled by escalating anti-immigration rhetoric, the protests became flashpoints in the broader struggle over who is permitted to belong. In the UK's hostile environment, exclusionary public discourse intertwines with harmful immigration policies (Mayblin et al., 2020) to create a system which grudgingly offers temporary shelter, but denies access to homeplace. This paper draws on data generated with sanctuary seekers in the north of England, who participate in community theatre designed to support their belonging. Data were generated using a post-qualitative ethnographic approach that foregrounds relationality and non-verbal, non-representational ways of knowing (MacLure, 2013). The paper explores how sanctuary-seekers resist the government-sanctioned denial of home by engaging in acts of homemaking that reach beyond the walls of their dwelling-places (Blunt and Dowling, 2022). Participants consistently resist their positioning as passive victims through the ongoing labour of making home (Massey, 2005; Van Liempt and Miellet, 2021) enacted through mutual acts of hospitality, care, play and joy: often in and around the theatre. Reading data through Tim Ingold's concept of meshwork (2007), the paper demonstrates how both the physical space of the theatre and the social space created by participants' activities are performed as homeplaces where safety is cultivated and relationships deepen. This mutually constructed ‘meshwork of belonging’ offers a counter-narrative to dominant accounts of passivity and dependency, providing a vision of agency and collective care rooted in the everyday labour of making home.

3. *From liberal refuge to neoliberal exclusion: Postcolonial legacies in the Hong Kong–UK BN(O) migration scheme*

Ka Chun Au (University of Essex)

Abstract: The British National (Overseas) [BN(O)] visa scheme, launched in 2021, was hailed as a humanitarian gesture to Hongkongers fleeing Beijing's authoritarian turn. Yet its design reveals the selective humanitarianism and colonial hierarchies underpinning UK migration governance in illiberal times. With 200,000 arrivals by mid-2025, BN(O) migrants have been cast as “good migrants”: educated, politically aligned, and economically productive. In sharp contrast to asylum seekers from the Global South, their welcome is celebrated as evidence of Britain's moral duty and global relevance. Despite privileged legal access, BN(O) migrants face precarious labour conditions, restricted welfare rights, and cultural exclusion. Their experiences reveal the contradictions between humanitarian rhetoric and neoliberal practice, exposing how migrant belonging remains contingent on economic utility. Drawing on 40 narrative interviews with highly skilled BN(O) migrants currently living in the UK and those who

returned to Hong Kong, this paper interrogates how migrants navigate conditional inclusion, systemic deskilling, and hybrid identity formation. By contrasting the valorisation of BN(O) migrants with the vilification of other groups, the paper demonstrates how migration policy serves as a site of ideological contestation, racialised boundary-drawing, and postcolonial responsibility. The emergence of return migration further disrupts linear settlement narratives, underlining the limits of Britain's self-portrayal as a liberal refuge. The BN(O) case illustrates how migration governance is strategically mobilised to manage mobility and produce political narratives of deservingness, reflecting the polarised dynamics of contemporary migration politics.

4. *A new zone of anomaly: What does migration mean to high-skilled Turkish migrant women in post-Brexit Britain*

Dilvin Dilara Usta (Bournemouth University)

Abstract: This paper focuses on the experiences of skilled Turkish migrant women in post-Brexit Britain and how these experiences are tied to the UK's recent migrant policies. Acknowledging the significant impact of new nationalist rhetoric on migration policies and practices across many Western societies, it has become vital to explore the meaning of migration for skilled women migrants. Thus, I draw on in-depth qualitative interviews from two different case studies, conducted in 2018 and 2024, with 18 highly skilled Turkish women migrants in the UK, to contribute to understanding how skilled migrant women navigate their gender and ethnicity while interacting with UK migration policies. I utilise the theoretical framework of Harriet Martineau's (1838) "morals and manners" because her work on the relationship between everyday life, idea of liberty and the anomalies created can be applied with adjustments to contemporary issues tied with migration to analyse how contradictions between the State's social values (morals) and actual practices (manners) can generate different obstacles for migrant women. Though some of these struggles can be applicable to many migrant women, my studies address how the participants find alternative ways to either accept or challenge these state-generated obstacles. Most importantly, Martineau's theoretical framework sheds light on the UK's confine rhetoric about protecting human rights and promoting diversity, and reveals the gap between policy intentions and social realities. This paper informs migration studies and policymakers working on migration, gender and ethnicity-related issues by highlighting migrant women's agency and contemporary migration policy impacts, particularly during the post-Brexit period.

5. *A matter of gazes. How racialization defines migrants' lived experience in Naples*

Andrea Ruben Pomella (University of Naples "L'Orientale")

Abstract: Grounded in ethnographic research conducted since 2018 within migrant communities in Naples, South Italy, this paper examines how diverse processes of racialization (Hall, 1990; Quijano, 2000; Goldberg, 2002) shape and define everyday life. Working closely with the local Senegalese Association allowed me to observe and engage with a range of needs and challenges (e.g., legal, economic, housing) around which migrants' lives revolve. Importantly, stories emerged from informal conversations, in-depth interviews, and participant observation indicated that temporal, spatial, and affective dimensions, though often underestimated, are central to the construction of self-determination and agency. The lived experience (Fanon 2015[1952]) of participants was shaped by segregated spaces and repressed affects, immersed in the condition of 'eternal waiting' (Khosravi, 2014) for legal recognition. This waiting influenced not only material conditions and the fulfilment of personal goals, but also the right to stay and to move (Della Porta 2019), bodily experience (Merleau-Ponty, 2011 [1945]; Fanon, 2015 [1952]), and social interactions. Reflexivity, empathy, and social proximity, concepts informed by Bourdieu's theory of practice (1977), facilitated the observation of participants beyond stereotypical victim narratives. This process helped me deconstruct my colonial gaze (Farinelli 2025; Febrianto 2025) revealing practices of solidarity and resistance within the community. Ultimately, alternative narratives and embodied experiences enable a subversion of racialized assumptions and the creation of interpretive frameworks that valorise plural epistemologies and structures of feeling (Williams 1977).

TUESDAY, 17 MARCH 2026
15:00-16:30 CET

PANEL 16 (ON-SITE, Building L5, Floor 1, Room 1/1):

MIGRANTS' POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT IN CHALLENGING TIMES

Chair: Sorina Carstea (University of Luxembourg)

Discussant: Daniela Vintila (University of Liège)

1. *Cast (the vote) away: Why Romanian emigrants support the radical right in home elections*

Sergiu Gherghina (University of Glasgow); Aurelian Giugal (University of Bucharest)

Abstract: The recent appeal of the radical right among Romanian emigrants goes against previous findings suggesting that emigrants are generally less inclined to vote for such political candidates. To understand why some emigrants support the radical right, this study focuses on the institutional characteristics of countries of residence. We use an original dataset of the aggregate voting patterns of Romanian emigrants in 44 countries around the world where at least 100 people voted. We focus on the four most recent elections in which the radical right gained prominence: the 2020 and 2024 national legislative elections, and the 2024 and 2025 presidential elections. The results show that the highest support comes from countries with high levels of democracy, those with large communities of Romanian emigrants, and those which are relatively close to Romania. Other variables, such as the presence of the radical right in the politics of the countries of residence or economic indicators, have no effect. The paper addresses well the conference's aim regarding an analysis about how contentious contexts, which are often exploited by the radical right, impact migrants' ability to react, resist and organize in countries of origin.

2. *Local representation or managed diversity? Political candidacies of refugee-background individuals in Belgium*

Ahmad Wali Ahmad Yar (Vrije Universiteit Brussel & University of Krems); Tuba Bircan (Vrije Universiteit Brussel)

Abstract: This paper examines the political candidacies of individuals with a background of international protection in Belgium, where migration and asylum are central and polarising issues in electoral politics. Refugee-background candidates have appeared across the political spectrum, including in parties not traditionally associated with pro-migrant agendas, raising questions about whether their inclusion reflects democratic renewal or strategic diversity management. The study draws on fifteen semi-structured interviews with former candidates at local, regional, and national levels. It investigates their motivations for entering politics, their perceptions of party strategies, and their own interpretations of political representation. The analysis combines perspectives on strategic inclusion, symbolic and descriptive representation, and candidate agency to capture both party logics and candidate narratives. Findings show that while parties often nominate refugee-background candidates to signal openness or broaden electoral appeal, candidates themselves describe their engagement as rooted in advocacy, community leadership, and personal experience. Yet they face significant structural barriers, including limited networks and uneven access to resources, which constrain their influence. At the same time, their agency challenges assumptions of passive inclusion, as they actively negotiate visibility and legitimacy within partisan contexts. By centring candidate perspectives, this paper contributes to debates on democratic legitimacy, representation, and the politics of diversity in Europe. It highlights the tension between symbolic inclusion and substantive participation, offering new insights into how migration reshapes representative democracy in an era of contestation.

3. *Portuguese emigrants at the polls: The rise of the far right*

Inês Vidigal (Emigration Observatory, Iscte University Institute of Lisbon); Cláudia Pereira (Emigration Observatory, Iscte University Institute of Lisbon); Joana Azevedo (Iscte University Institute of Lisbon)

Abstract: In recent years, Portugal witnessed a striking transformation in the electoral behaviour of its emigrant population, particularly evident in the growing support for the far right in the most recent national elections. This presentation explores this political shift through a longitudinal analysis of Portuguese emigrants' voting behaviours across the two external electoral constituencies — European

and extra-European — with a focus on the 2024 and 2025 legislative elections. While traditionally characterized by low turnout and support for mainstream parties, recent data reveals a significant increase in both participation and far-right preferences, with Chega emerging as a leading force. Drawing on official electoral data from 2005 to 2025, this presentation identifies key moments and trajectories in emigrant voting behaviour. Between 2005 and 2019 traditional parties of the center, right and left, got a great majority of the votes. Support for the far right emerged and grew exponentially since 2019, first at the national level, and in 2024 and 2025 at the external electoral constituencies. The analysis considers variation by region and structural and political factors that may help explain this shift, including patterns of political disengagement, disillusionment with mainstream parties, and the influence of transnational media ecosystems. In a comparative perspective, the paper situates the Portuguese case within broader European trends, where far-right parties have similarly gained ground among citizens living abroad. By doing so, it contributes to ongoing debates on the transnational diffusion of illiberal politics and the complex political agency of emigrants in times of polarization.

4. *Migrant Remittances and the Decline of Presidential Term Limits in Sub-Saharan Africa*

Ana Isabel Lopez Garcia (Maastricht University)

Abstract: This paper contributes to the study of the relationship between international migration and democracy by examining how the receipt of migrant remittances influences public support for the abolition of presidential term limits in sub-Saharan Africa, a region where electoral turnovers are rare and incumbents often manipulate term limits to prolong their rule. Using Afrobarometer data, the analysis shows that remittance recipients are significantly more likely to back the removal of presidential term limits not out of trust in leaders but as a self-interested strategy to preserve the status quo and protect the assets they have accumulated through remittance income. Support for indefinite presidential rule is indeed higher among recipients who are wealthy and fearful of crime or political violence. This relationship, however, is conditional on regime type. It holds in democracies and hybrid regimes—where elections hold some weight, but disappears in autocracies—where term limits are already irrelevant. Migrant remittances, often hailed as a force for regime change, may stall democratic progress by promoting risk-averse preferences among recipients who prioritize the stability of strongman rule over the uncertainties of power alternation.

5. *Political incorporation of immigrants in Japan: The focus on the intention of citizenship acquisition*

Hirohisa Takenoshita (Keio University)

Abstract: Immigration scholarship has paid more attention to various dimensions of immigrant integration. More research has been implemented concerning economic integration in recent countries of immigration than in other forms of integration. Previous literature on immigrant integration has adopted institutional perspectives, shedding light on how laws and formal institutions regarding immigration control policies have emerged and changed over time. Meanwhile, there is less research on how individual migrants view political participation and citizenship acquisition in their receiving states, using the quantitative survey data on migrants in newly emerging destinations. Japan is one of the interesting cases because it is highly reluctant to identify itself as a country of immigration despite the strong demand for migrant workers due to the demographic crisis. Japan is seen as an ethno-nationalist country that lacks a model of civic integration. By investigating the roles of assimilation, economic integration, social capital, civic engagement, and a sense of belonging in shaping the intention of citizenship acquisition, we discuss the mechanisms by which political incorporation occurs among immigrants in the country where citizenship strongly overlaps with ethnic and national identities. In this study, we explore what shapes the intention of citizenship acquisition among immigrants in Japan, using the nationally representative survey of immigrants in Japan in 2018.

PANEL 17 (ON-SITE, Building L5, Floor 1, Room 1/6):

RETHINKING EU ASYLUM AND MIGRATION GOVERNANCE IN CONTENTIOUS TIMES

Chair: Leah Durst-Lee (University of Coimbra)

Discussant: Andrea Spehar (University of Gothenburg)

1. *“Instrumentalisation” of migration: An emerging paradigm in EU asylum policy?*

Daniele Saracino (Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies); Lena Laube (University of Bonn)

Abstract: In light of a relatively small number of asylum seekers at the EU's eastern external borders, several EU member states are undermining refugee protection in Europe, justifying their actions by citing attempts by Russia and Belarus of "weaponising" migration. Beyond national bordering efforts that include illegal pushbacks, stricter border control measures and asylum law derogations have been incorporated into the 2024 reform of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). Recently, the instrumentalisation argument has been extended to other neighbouring regions of the EU. This paper investigates the narrative of so-called instrumentalisation of migration and its impact on the trajectory of European asylum policy. Employing both qualitative and quantitative methods—including the measurement of rhetorical frequencies and the tracing of the policy process—we assess whether this narrative constitutes an emerging paradigm that is guiding the direction of asylum and refugee policy in the EU. The observable escalation of the instrumentalisation argument, which is being embedded in EU law, appears to be eroding European norms and values internally, for example by increasing repression of civil society organisations aiding asylum-seekers. Externally, it risks legitimising the actions of actors who are accused of engaging in instrumentalisation by leading to rule of law backsliding within and an active erosion of international norms by the bloc, thereby weakening the EU's international appeal and influence. A new instrumentalisation paradigm in EU asylum policy could therefore have far-reaching implications for European democracy and security.

2. *In all fairness: Dublin transfers and the redistribution of asylum responsibility*

Philipp Stutz (Vrije Universiteit Brussel); Florian Trauner (Vrije Universiteit Brussel).

Abstract: Solidarity and fairness in the allocation of responsibilities for refugee protection has emerged as a central challenge in European asylum governance. The Dublin Regulation, which assigns responsibility for asylum claims primarily to the first country of entry, has long been criticized for generating unequal burdens and undermining solidarity within the EU. While political and academic debates have increasingly invoked fairness as a guiding principle, empirical assessments of how responsibility is actually distributed under the Dublin system remain limited. This article advances a new empirical perspective by conceptualizing fairness in terms of equitable responsibility-sharing and analysing official Dublin statistics from 2008 to 2023. Using the EU's own distribution key as a normative benchmark, we assess the extent to which the Dublin mechanism reduces or exacerbates asymmetries between member states. Contrary to common perceptions, we find that Dublin transfers modestly reduce—rather than reinforce—imbalances in asylum responsibilities, as a result of the geographic patterns of refugee arrivals paired with the partial implementation of the Dublin rules. These findings challenge prevailing critiques of the system and offer important insights for evaluating the fairness and future viability of the EU's reformed solidarity mechanism.

3. *From temporary rights to contentious futures: Navigating the EU's policy gaps for displaced Ukrainians*
Viktoryia Vaitovich (Ca' Foscari University of Venice)

Abstract: This paper analyses the impact of the EU's response to the displacement from Ukraine, as well as Ukraine's parallel EU accession process. The paper unveils the implications of this unprecedented policy context on the longer-term socio-economic integration of displaced Ukrainians. In line with the conference theme of "Governing and Experiencing Migration in Contentious Times", this paper examines a deeply contentious landscape marked by rising solidarity fatigue and a politicised accession process for Ukraine. It assesses how the EU's activation of the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) created unique, albeit temporary, access to rights. Besides consolidating the existing research in the area, this paper draws on a policy and legal analysis, supplemented by background interviews with experts, to assess the interplay between the TPD framework, fragmented post-TP policies at the national level, and Ukraine's parallel EU accession process. The paper argues that persisting policy gaps at the EU level stemming from the lack of a unified and timely approach that would create a smooth transition from humanitarian assistance and temporary rights under TPD, to EU citizenship rights, increase vulnerabilities to exploitation among the displaced persons, as well as the risks of premature return or becoming undocumented. This paper serves as the foundational output of the project "RESTART: Labour market experiences of post-temporary protection Ukrainians in the EU", contextualising its subsequent findings based on ethnographic research within a comprehensive policy landscape.

4. *The digitalization of EU air border controls and the normalization of banal securitization*
Eline Waerp (Friedrich-Alexander-Universität)

Abstract: Much literature on EU border control focuses on irregularized migration at the sea and land borders, despite the fact that it only accounts for a fraction of the total number of border crossings annually, most of which are categorized as regular and take place at the air borders. The intense focus on irregularized migration at the sea and land borders is thus puzzling considering the limited scope of this form of mobility at these borders. This paper shifts the focus from the politicized and mediatized issue of irregularized migration at the EU's sea and land borders to this neglected area of research in migration studies. Focusing on one of Europe's busiest airports for extra-EU arrivals, Amsterdam Airport Schiphol, and drawing on interviews with different actors across the 'travel ecosystem' (including ICAO and IATA officials; DG Home, Frontex, and eu-LISA officials; along with tech providers, carriers, airport authorities, and border guards), the paper illuminates how new technologies such as the Entry/Exit system (EES), the European Travel Information Authorisation System (ETIAS), and the Digital Travel Credential (DTC) impact how border controls are carried out. Advancing the notion of banal securitization, I argue that these emerging tools facilitate the normalization of banal securitization in EU border control, blurring the distinction between 'irregular' vs. 'regular' mobility as more people come under strict security checks. The paper's focus on migration governance relates directly to the conference theme, shedding light on how the current contentious context has come to negatively impact regular mobility as well.

5. *Intersecting inequalities and fragmented justice: Rethinking EU gender and migration governance*
Sinem Yilmaz (Vrije Universiteit Brussel); Tuba Bircan (Vrije Universiteit Brussel)

Abstract: This article examines how intensifying migratory flows into and across the European Union (EU) expose persistent gaps in policy frameworks intended to protect vulnerable groups and generate what we term "fragmented justice." While the EU continues to present itself as a normative actor grounded in rights, equality and inclusion, these commitments often unravel when confronted with the complexities of intersectional disadvantage. Drawing on intersectionality theory (Crenshaw; Collins) and Nancy Fraser's tripartite model of social justice, we argue that institutional mandates, legal provisions, and policy framings address inequalities in isolation, obscuring the structural mechanisms through which they are produced and sustained. We develop an Intersectionality and Justice-Based Policy Framework (IJBPF) that synthesises intersectional analysis with Fraser's model to assess redistributive justice, cultural recognition, and participatory inclusion. Using Critical Frame Analysis and Intersectionality-Based Policy Analysis, we conduct a comparative analysis of key EU gender, migration, and integration policies, complemented by illustrative case studies. Three main patterns emerge: policies frame inequality in single-axis terms that emphasize formal equality while neglecting substantive redistribution; migration governance remains securitized, reducing vulnerability checks to minimal procedural steps; and intersectionality is invoked rhetorically but rarely implemented through concrete measures or binding mechanisms. These dynamics produce incoherent and sometimes contradictory approaches across policy domains, reinforcing hierarchies among women, and gender minorities, especially those situated at the nexus of migration, race, and economic precarity. The IJBPF offers both a diagnostic lens and a foundation for reimagining EU governance as an instrument of structural redress rather than symbolic inclusion.

PANEL 18 (ON-SITE, Building L3, Ground floor, Room 0/51):

POPULISM AND MIGRATION GOVERNANCE

Chair: Henna Nurmi (University of Helsinki)

Discussant: João Carvalho (CIES-ISCTE)

1. *The populist turn in migration laws and policies: The case of the Netherlands*
Ricky van Oers (Radboud University); Karen Geertsema (Radboud University)

Abstract: Populist forces have been influencing migration laws and policies around the globe and the Netherlands forms no exception. After years of vehement anti-immigrant rhetorics, the extreme right 'Freedom Party' (PVV) won the 2024 elections. Subsequently, for the first time, it took part in a coalition government. In the agreement on principles, the new coalition promised to install 'the toughest regime regarding those seeking asylum and the most encompassing package to attain control over migration ever'. Proposals of law concerning the limitation of rights of migrants were rapidly introduced. Although the government fell less than a year after it was installed, these proposals have been adopted by the Second Chamber. The above shows the influence of populist forces on the domain of migration.

Nevertheless, it would be false to state that Dutch migration laws and policies have been immune to populism prior to the PVV's electoral gain in 2024, or even that it coincides with the establishment of the party in 2005. In fact, a 'paradigm shift' related to the political perspectives on migration and integration occurred already at the turn of the 21st century (Bonjour 2009, Groenendijk 2008). In this paper, we explain how populism has been shaping Dutch migration laws and policies over the past decades, focusing on civic integration and the rights of asylum seekers and refugees. In doing so, we illustrate how partisan proposals and legislative changes related to immigration have evolved in times of heightened contention due to the rise of populism.

2. *Populism, migration, and the weaponization of women's rights in European law*

Veronica Federico (University of Florence)

Abstract: In recent years, anti-immigration discourse has emerged as a central component of the political success of populist radical right (PRR) parties across Europe. This paper explores how restrictive migration and integration policies are increasingly framed not only as matters of national security or cultural preservation, but also as instruments for reasserting traditional gender norms under the guise of protecting women's rights. Drawing on a comparative legal and political analysis of seven European countries—Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, and Sweden—this study investigates how PRR parties deploy gender equality rhetoric to justify migration control and reinforce exclusionary national identities. The analysis reveals a growing legal and political paradox: while these parties claim to champion women's rights, they simultaneously undermine broader frameworks of gender equality and human rights. This strategic misuse of feminist language serves to obscure discriminatory policies and fosters a climate of uncertainty in migration governance. The increasing legal barriers to both immigration and integration are not merely administrative, but ideological, reflecting broader populist agendas that target pluralism and liberal democratic norms. By examining national legislative trends, political discourse, and institutional responses, the paper highlights how gender and migration have become deeply entangled in the populist project. Ultimately, this study contributes to a critical understanding of how legal regimes are shaped by political ideologies, and how the instrumentalization of women's rights becomes a site of contestation in the governance of European borders.

3. *From Social Europe to Christian Europe: Shifts in EU-level integration policy in light of the right-wing populist turn*

Iva Dodevska (Vrije Universiteit Brussel)

Abstract: This paper critically maps the ruptures and continuities of the EU's approach to 'diversity governance' in the past three decades in light of a persistent political move to the right and a mounting anti-immigrant backlash across EU member states. The mainstreaming of far-right discourse and the widespread shift to the right of Europe's political establishment did not only impact migration governance, but also integration governance. I propose a typology of the (sometimes opposing) discourses that converge in the EU migrant integration policy, differentiating between neoliberal, egalitarian (welfarist), securitarian and boundary integrationism. I argue that while the early predominantly welfarist and neoliberal discourse on integration was only vaguely interested in questions of values and identity, the recent reformulation of the EU's integrationist strategy represents a break from universalist ideas of a 'European community'. In particular, the Commission under von der Leyen adopted a more nativist and securitarian discourse that frames 'integration' as a wager in an alleged civilizationist clash between the liberal and the 'illiberal' world. Instead of dampening nativist and nationalist claims in integration governance in line with a supranational European project, EU institutions reinforced an exclusionary and identitarian conceptualization of belonging. I argue that the rising importance of adherence to liberal values as a proxy for 'integration', the reinvention of 'European values' as cultural values springing from the Judeo-Christian liberal tradition, and drawing new boundaries around the subject of integration are three developments that amount to an important shift in the European Union's migration and integration agenda.

4. *Doing migration in the illiberal context of Hungary*

Zsuzsanna Árendás (ELTE Center for Social Sciences, CEU); Vera Messing (ELTE Center for Social Sciences, CEU)

Abstract: Our paper explores migration governance in Hungary under the increasingly autocratic Fidesz government, highlighting the paradoxes that characterize migration policy in illiberal regimes. Since 2015, Hungary has deployed an intensely anti-immigration narrative rooted in protectionist nationalism,

which coexists with a highly selective immigration system designed to serve short-term economic and political interests. While publicly rejecting multiculturalism and portraying itself as a defender of ethnic homogeneity and European Christian identity, the Hungarian state admits carefully chosen migrant labor to meet economic demands, particularly through temporary work schemes. To analyze this contradiction, we apply and extend Natter's (2018) concept of the illiberal paradox in migration governance, adding insights from racial capitalism to show how labor market needs and nationalist ideologies intersect. Hungary's migration regime demonstrates a distinct selectivity not constrained by liberal democratic values such as human rights yet remains responsive to electoral pressures. Unlike liberal states that must balance humanitarian principles, economic interests, and public opinion, Hungary swiftly enacts exclusionary policies without democratic deliberation, due to its centralized autocratic structure. Through two case studies—migrant laborers in industrial sectors and asylum seekers—we illustrate how migration policies operationalize selective inclusion and exclusion. We also reflect critically on methodological biases in scholarship on Eastern Europe, challenging simplistic dichotomies between liberal and illiberal regimes. By offering a nuanced analysis of Hungary's migration governance, our paper contributes to broader debates on the evolving dynamics of migration policy in both autocratizing and democratic contexts.

PANEL 19 (ON-SITE, Building L5, Ground floor, Room 0/3):

MIGRANT AGENCY AND FORMS OF RESISTANCE IN CONTENTIOUS TIMES

Chair: Shannon Gouppy (University of Liège)

Discussant: Elisa Brey (Complutense University of Madrid)

1. *Silence as resistance in contentious migration contexts*

Anusree P. (Indian Institute of Technology Bombay)

Abstract: In India, where right-wing Hindutva politics increasingly shape migration governance, religion rather than migration per se structures political hostility. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has institutionalized this logic through measures such as the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which removes barriers to citizenship for Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, and Christians from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan who arrived before 31 December 2014, while explicitly excluding Muslims. Consistent political vitriol has been directed at Bangladeshi migrants and, at Rohingya refugees — one of the world's most persecuted stateless communities. Labelled "illegal immigrants" and "security threats," the Rohingya face surveillance, detention, and expulsions to Bangladesh, creating an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty. This fraught environment also reshapes the scope of humanitarianism. Muslim civil society organizations and political parties, wary of legal reprisals and political targeting, have strategically distanced themselves from the Rohingya. Yet for those who continue to provide aid, silence becomes a central mode of resistance. This paper examines how humanitarian actors deploy silence not as absence, but as a calculated practice: shielding themselves from criminalization, avoiding the reproduction of polarized discourses, and preserving the possibility of offering support without attracting state attention. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork with Rohingya refugees and Muslim aid groups in Hyderabad, the paper situates silence within broader debates on belonging, agency, and survival under illiberal politics. It argues that silence complicates assumptions that resistance must take the form of public voice, instead revealing subtle modes of endurance, negotiation, and refusal.

2. *The rural counterspace: Migrant creation of community spaces as an act of resistance to structural and racial inequalities*

Iris Egea Quijada (Vrije Universiteit Brussel)

Abstract: In the context of global political polarisation, migration in declining rural areas has become a contentious issue. Years of political austerity, the downscaling of migration governance to under-resourced local authorities and neoliberalist restructuring processes prioritising productivity and profit have deepened inequalities. Local communities are left with heightened feelings of abandonment and deprivation. These tensions are often projected onto migrants, who are portrayed as burdens and racially excluded. Such dynamics have contributed to the normalisation of regressive policies and to self-restraint research that struggles to challenge existing power relations. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in two rural towns in Spain and Ireland (2024-2025), drawing on rural spatial justice (Woods, 2023) and the concept of the counterspace (Lefebvre, 1991), this contribution argues that community spaces are missing

but essential for mutual understanding and recognition of community members in the face of structural inequalities. Migrant labourers in the meat industry and asylum seekers in the towns are racialised and paradoxically valued for economic utility while simultaneously being shaped as a financial liability. They claim space in ways that are misunderstood or dismissed by host communities. By self-organising, creating new or adapting existing spaces, they practice their agency, resist precarious conditions, cope with racial exclusion, and build new forms of solidarity. This presentation calls for more critical research that questions existing power asymmetries and migrants' intersectional experiences of racism and discrimination. It also advocates for social policies that recognise inclusive community spaces as crucial for creating more sustainable rural societies.

3. *Relational agency within forced migration: The case of Ukrainian migrants in Romania*

Mihaela Nedelcu (University of Neuchâtel)

Abstract: The agency of undocumented migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees has in general been framed as resistance and voluntarism in response to structural adversities during exile, transit and resettlement. This paper proposes a renewed, relational approach to agency in forced migration, emphasizing the value of social relationships for the forced migrants' capacity to act and "make a difference" (Giddens 1984). Drawing on relational sociology and social network analysis, we conceptualize "relational agency" as emerging from dynamic interactions and interdependencies within personal networks, comprising both individual and collective actors, locally and transnationally, across different stages of migration. Using the case of Ukrainian forced migrants in Romania, we present findings from a qualitative study combining semi-structured interviews with ego-network mapping. By analyzing the composition, geographic dispersion, and temporal evolution of respondents' personal networks, we identify four distinct but incremental types of relational agency. These types of agency emerge from the interplay between network (re)configurations – i.e., changes in the type of ties and the content of exchanged support – and the ways in which forced migrants actively do agency through sustained relational work. Relational agency thus appears as a continuum of doing agency, unfolding through evolving social connections and contextual contingencies. This paper supports the conference's aims by: 1) demonstrating how forced migrants navigate hostile or restrictive environments; 2) advancing a relational perspective on agency within (forced) migration processes; and 3) using ego-networking mapping as a fresh methodological lens for understanding migrant agency.

4. *Navigating the Dublin predicament: Politics of escape and migrants' dwelling infrastructures along the Belgian-French route to the UK*

Ismail Oubad (University of Liège)

Abstract: The Dublin Regulation, designed to "make asylum orderly", in practice territorializes protection and increasingly excludes those who have been registered elsewhere. Those who have been denied asylum and moved beyond this territorial ascription seeking a prospect of protection are reframed as "unauthorized" migrants, subjected to bordering practices that exhaust both bodies and unauthorized solidarities. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork along the Belgian-French route to the UK, I analyze the politics of escape enacted by "Dublinized" migrants who, abandoned by the system that should protect them, devise strategies to navigate capture and pursue protection elsewhere. These escapes are not solitary acts but are sustained by fragile and constantly shifting circuits of dwelling infrastructures (squats, encampments, civic housing, and informal resting points) that enable movement along bordered routes and toward attempts to leave Schengen altogether. By treating the route as a scale of observation, with its circuits of dwelling infrastructures as a material manifestation, I show how migrants and their supporters exercise agency in contentious times—not only by fleeing, but by reconfiguring sanctuary through (im)mobility. This paper argues that these practices reveal alternative geographies of belonging and protection that persist at the margins of state governance.

5. *Insecure citizenship and the agency of stateless individuals in the United States*

Claire R. Thomas (New York Law School)

Abstract: Defined under international law as a person who is "not considered as a national by any state under the operation of its law," there are an estimated 200,000 stateless persons living in the United States. Stateless individuals face myriad socio-legal challenges, including lack of identification and travel documents, inability to secure social benefits, family separation, marginalization, and complex immigration issues. Because of logistical difficulties of deporting stateless individuals, many have been under surveillance for decades. The second Trump Administration has unleashed a litany of harmful

actions undermining progress on civil and human rights worldwide. These harms include preventing access to asylum and refugee protection, indefinite detention, denaturalization, legal challenges to birthright citizenship, as well as enforced disappearances of non-citizens to danger in third countries. Some of those most impacted, and most invisible, by these actions include stateless individuals. While the Trump Administration purports to offer non-citizens agency to “self-deport”, it provides no acknowledgement or feasibility of how stateless persons can do so, without being unlucky enough to be forcibly disappeared to a mega prison in El Salvador. This paper explores how stateless persons in the United States exercise their agency in navigating the current political climate. Further, this paper discusses how current migration policies, including third country deportations, denaturalizations, and the legal challenges to birthright citizenship, disparately impact- and potentially increase- stateless individuals. Finally, this paper advances the idea that bipartisan protections for stateless individuals are possible in contentious times and looks to regional examples in the Americas.

PANEL 20 (ONLINE):

JUDICIAL PRACTICES AND THE POLITICS OF IMMIGRATION CONTROL

Chair: Emma Vescovi (University of Liège)

Discussant: Nives Mazur Kumric (University of Liège)

1. *Fundamental rights and access to justice in times of polarisation: The Italy-Albania protocol*

Francesca Biondi Dal Monte (Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies); Kamilla Zsuzsanna Galicz (Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies).

Abstract: The paper proposes the legal analysis of current obstacles of accessing asylum in Europe based on the case study of the 2024 Italy-Albania Protocol. Specifically, it seeks to investigate the Protocol's scheme of externalising migration control, and the institutional debate it has triggered both at domestic and European level. To this end, the paper is structured as follows. First, it assesses the Protocol in light of Italy's international and constitutional obligations, including its duties stemming from EU law, with special regard to the application of the rules on border procedures and detention of migrants and asylum-seekers. The procedural aspects of the evaluation of the asylum applications will be explored with the fundamental rights of the persons transported to the Albanian centres (such as the right to personal liberty, the right to health and due process guarantees). Second, the paper examines the institutional debate about the Protocol between national courts and the executive, exploring the judicial techniques to uphold the fundamental rights of migrants and asylum-seekers against harshening anti-immigration policies. In particular, the paper will focus on the dialogue between domestic judges and the EU Court of Justice on border procedures and the safe country of origin concept. The ultimate aim is to reflect on the Protocol's polarising impact on European externalisation policies, either seen as a role model to replicate or as a project that goes against both the fundamental principles of the Italian Constitution and the core values of the European integration.

2. *Safe country, unsafe law: Populist migration reforms and constitutional degradation*

Prema Elumalai (Vellore Institute of Technology; Ragul Olakkur Vijayakumar (Madras High Court)

Abstract: Recent years have seen populist parties exploit migration debates to entrench exclusionary policies into law. Across Europe, radical-right narratives – framing Western values like gender equality against migrant practices – have legitimized tougher asylum rules. The paper asks: how do illiberal legislative strategies reshape asylum rights and migrants' agency under politicized governance? The paper analyzes Italy's 2024–25 asylum reforms as a case study. For example, Decree-Law 158/2024 (later codified as Law 187/2024) incorporated an expanded list of safe countries into statute, mandating accelerated border procedures for nationals of those states. Our doctrinal analysis shows these measures amount to a form of constitutional degradation of migration law. By treating diverse migrants through one-size-fits-all rules, lawmakers undermine rule-of-law and legal certainty, shrinking migrants' agency. The paper argues that Italy's strategy conflicts with EU principles (e.g. the right to an effective remedy under Article 47 EUCFR) and with CJEU jurisprudence requiring transparent, challengeable safe-country lists. Methodologically, the paper employs comparative doctrinal analysis of statutes and case law to trace how law is used for political ends. This connects politicized migration discourse to tangible legal outcomes: restrictive laws reflect anti-immigrant sentiment while curtailing asylum seekers' rights and strategies. It thus bridges legal doctrine and migration politics – a novel doctrinal lens in migration research – highlighting how exclusionary statutes translate into concrete rights deprivations for migrants.

3. *Overruled: Immigration judge reported responses to use of forensic mental health evaluators in deportation defense*

Cherra M. Mathis (University of Kentucky); Mary Lehman Held (University of Tennessee); Laurie Cook Heffron (St. Edward's University); Karen E. Latus (Somos Indivisible)

Abstract: Forensic mental health (FMH) evaluators provide assessment, evaluation, affidavits, and where necessary, testimony, to educate immigration judges on psychological and emotional impacts of torture, abuse and persecution for migrating people. However, these experts face objections to their expertise in deportation defense cases. This novel study explores both reasons for, and outcomes of, such objections. Legal advocates in the United States (n=242) were surveyed regarding use of FMH evaluators in immigration court and objections to expertise in their cases. Eighty-one participants reported experiencing or observing objections by judges or government attorneys; participants provided brief written explanations of the outcome of these objections. Findings indicated that most objections came from government attorneys, based on credentialing, scope of expertise, and perceived evaluator pro-immigrant bias. Credentialing-based objections addressed the appropriateness and legitimacy of expert knowledge to assess immigrant wellbeing; all evaluators faced accusations of practicing beyond the scope of their license. Some judges (10%) sustained objections, and deemed experts not credible, blocking their evaluations and testimony from the record. More commonly (34%), judges accepted experts' reports and testimony after extensive interrogation of the expert witness but gave this evidence less "weight" in consideration of case facts. In most cases (56%), however, judges overruled objections, certifying experts and accepting their reports and testimony. FMH expertise can be essential in deportation defense cases. Qualified and competent expertise was generally recognized by adjudicators despite objections, suggesting that the unique value of evaluator's insight on violence, trauma, and persecution is a vital contribution in deportation defense work.

4. *Migrant regularization with adjectives. An exploration of the concept of regularization in an age of migration restrictionism*

Andres Besserer Rayas (CUNY & El Colegio de México); Andrea Peña-Vásquez (University of Pittsburgh); Aala Abdelgadir (University of Pittsburgh)

Abstract: This paper seeks to address an important gap in migration studies: how do scholars conceptualize migrant regularization around the world and what sort of conceptual tools should researchers employ? The importance of studying the diversity of migrant regularization is to show that states have a robust alternative to increased deportations, border enhancement, and pushback, in the form of rights extensions. In contentious times, it is critical to map these effective non-coercive governance policies of regularization and not focus exclusively on the coercive side of migration governance. This paper fills a gap, as it is a novel effort to study regularization globally and comparatively and to understand its different component parts – for instance, whether there is a route to citizenship, the time horizon, how targeted or universal the policy is, etcetera. The paper is based on the first leg of a multi-pronged research project, the Migrant Regularization and Data Archive (MiRADA) which seeks to map all immigrant regularization policies around the world since 1989. We have currently analyzed over 240 regularization policies from every continent and over 200 research papers on the topic. Using the debates in political science around the conceptual development of the contested term "democracy," this paper analyzes our literature review to first map the definitions and uses of the term regularization in over 200 papers from around the world and find the "core" elements of regularization that give us "minimum definitions" as well as the outer layers of meaning and the diversity of the concept's use.

PANEL 21 (ONLINE):

MIGRANT LABOR AND CARE IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

Chair: Almuhammad Allahham (University of Liège)

Discussant: Alexandra David (Westphalian University)

1. *Uncertain futures: Female international students and precarity*

Aynaz Ghaderi Ghalehno (Université de Montréal)

Abstract: Since 2020, the experience of international students in Canada, and particularly in Québec, has been marked by profound instability. Successive policy changes regarding study permits, work opportunities, and pathways to permanent residency have unsettled their academic and personal

trajectories. While international students are frequently portrayed in public discourse as desirable migrants, they often face hidden forms of vulnerability, caught between shifting regulations and polarized debates about migration. This paper focuses on the lived experiences of female international students who come from societies shaped by patriarchal structures and political turmoil. For these women, migration entails more than adapting to new institutional frameworks; it also requires navigating intersecting layers of precarity related to gender, race, class, and religion. Their stories reveal how contentious times translate into everyday uncertainties about identity, belonging, and the future. The central question guiding this research is: how do female international students in Québec experience and negotiate the insecurities generated by restrictive policies and rising anti-immigrant sentiments? In what ways do these dynamics reshape their academic aspirations, cultural engagement, and sense of self? The analysis is situated within intersectional feminist migration studies (Crenshaw, 1989; Anthias, 2013; El-Tayeb, 2011), which highlight how power relations and multiple inequalities intersect in the governance and experience of migration. By examining personal narratives and artistic practices, this paper shows both the vulnerabilities and the forms of agency that emerge from these contexts. It argues that female students' trajectories offer a privileged lens to understand how migration is governed and lived in contentious times.

2. *Contested care: Migration governance, labour precarity, and African care workers in the UK* Emmanuel Uchenna Chidozie (Catholic University of Leuven)

Abstract: This paper explores how the politicisation of migration in the United Kingdom shapes the working lives, identities, and futures of African care workers. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in Hertfordshire County, it investigates how workers from Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon, and Zimbabwe, experience the dual pressures of restrictive immigration regimes and the increasing marketisation of care. The study situates care work within the broader political economy of migration governance, where sponsorship visa schemes, wage thresholds, and privatised employment agencies structure both opportunity and vulnerability. In this contentious policy environment—marked by heightened anti-immigrant sentiment—migrant carers are simultaneously essential to sustaining the UK's ageing population and stigmatised as outsiders. Everyday experiences of discrimination, precarity, and overwork are intertwined with broader narratives of who “deserves” to belong. At the same time, the research highlights how care workers exercise agency and cultivate solidarities. Through faith networks, community associations, and informal economies of support, they create alternative infrastructures of belonging and survival. These practices reveal how migrants navigate and resist the exclusions of migration governance, while also exposing the uneven burdens placed upon racialised labour. By linking ethnographic insights to contemporary debates on labour, migration, and integration, the paper demonstrates how African care workers' experiences challenge Eurocentric framings of migration, illuminate the political stakes of care provision, and raise urgent questions about the future of care in an era of austerity and demographic change.

3. *(Un)effectiveness of the Temporary Protection EU Act – A study with Ukrainian refugees job applicants* Luca Fumarco (Masaryk University IZA, GLO, J-PAL)

Abstract: This is the first study to investigate the effectiveness of the EU temporary protection act (Implementing Decision, 2022/382). We conducted a matched pair correspondence test from March 24 to September 9, 2022, in the Czech labour market, where the so-called “Lex Ukraine” allows refugees an immediate free access to the domestic labour market. We sent unsolicited job inquiries for unskilled positions where language, skills, experience are irrelevant, and the ability to interact with native coworkers or customers is not expected. We compare five groups of applicants: Czech natives (reference group), Ukraine refugees with either Ukraine or Russian ethnicity, Ukraine and Russian permanent residents. We find a series of relevant results. First, Ukrainian refugees (regardless of their ethnicity) face a lower response rate than Czech applicants, despite the Lex Ukraine, and despite the irrelevance of language barriers and skills. Second, Ukraine refugees with Russian ethnicity are treated worse than compatriots with Ukrainian ethnicity, and are treated the same as Russian permanent residents, suggesting there is ethnic misidentification. Third, the response rate of all refugees and permanent residents groups decreases over time. Fourth, the response rate of refugees with Ukrainian ethnicity increases with the increase in the war victims, but at a decreasing rate, suggesting there is collectivist psychic numbing. Fifth, the response rate of refugees with Russian ethnicity is orthogonal to the quantity of war victims, which suggests a lower empathy toward them.

4. *The exported employment-education paradox? The gendered labor market integration of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Turkey, and Germany*

Maye Ehab (Institute for Employment Research); Lidwina Gundacker (Institute of Employment Research)

Abstract: Despite a massive rise in women's overall educational levels reaching gender parity in the early 2000s in pre-war Syria, female employment remained modest at levels around 10 percent, what is called education-employment paradox. This raises the question: Did the education-employment paradox travel with them? In other words, is Syrian employment in multiple destination countries similarly gender biased towards men or did other factors override this phenomenon? This study examines the gender employment gap among refugees in Lebanon, Turkey, and Germany, using data from surveys, including the Transnational Perspectives on Migration and Integration (TRANSMIT) in Turkey and Lebanon and the IAB-BAMF-SOEP refugee samples in Germany. We analyze pre-migration factors (e.g., education, work experience) and post-migration conditions (e.g., language proficiency, legal residency, childcare). We seek to understand how refugees from a single origin fare in three different receiving contexts. Results show that gender gap is largest in Turkey, followed by Lebanon and Germany, driven by remarkable cross-country differences in both male and female employment rates. In Germany, post-migration human capital—specifically language skills and participation in integration programs—is essential in narrowing the gender gap. In contrast, in Lebanon and Turkey, where informal labor markets are more prevalent, pre-migration human capital, particularly work experience, plays a more prominent role. This suggests that the relevance of human capital differs across destination countries, emphasizing the need for tailored integration strategies. The employment gap is lower in countries which normalize and facilitate female employment with high female labor force participation and prevalence of part-time employment.

5. *Working towards belonging: Migrant women's entrepreneurship and everyday citizenship*

Carolina Garcia (Saint Paul University)

Abstract: This paper examines how migrant women in Québec engage in self-employment not only as a response to exclusionary labor markets but as a means of negotiating belonging and crafting citizenship through everyday practices. Drawing on 50 biographical interviews with women from diverse racial, national, and class backgrounds, the study explores how self-employment emerges at the intersection of structural constraints and personal, situated contexts. Rather than framing entrepreneurship through push-pull factors, I propose the concept of technology of belonging—a process simultaneously shaped by neoliberal imperatives of self-reliance and affective investments in community, purpose, and autonomy. Participants described “creating their own jobs” as both a survival strategy and a moral project—anchored in the desire to contribute, navigate exclusionary labor markets, care for others, and “do something bigger” despite systemic barriers. These narratives reflect broader shifts in the governance of migration and labor, where citizenship is increasingly earned through economic productivity and emotional resilience. Here, personal responsibility, economic activities, and affective labor are deeply entangled. Through everyday practices—offering services, building micro-communities, and performing care—these women produce partial, situated, and continuously negotiated forms of civic participation. The findings unsettle normative accounts of integration by showing how migrant women mobilize self-employment as an agentic response to marginalization, a source of meaning, and a pathway to recognition. Belonging, here, is not a given but an ongoing, uneven process shaped by power, labor, and agency.

PANEL 22 (ONLINE):

BORDERS, BELONGING, AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS MIGRATION

Chair: Camila Melícia Valgas (Utrecht University of Applied Sciences)

Discussant: Edina Lilla Meszaros (University of Oradea)

1. *Contextual and compositional determinants of anti-immigrant attitudes: A cross-national analysis using World Values Survey Data*

Syeda Rabab Jafri (Lahore School of Economics)

Abstract: In today's contentious global climate marked by rising anti-immigrant sentiments and growing socio-political divides, understanding how individuals form attitudes toward immigration is more urgent than ever. This paper investigates how both contextual factors (e.g., social identity, institutional

imbalance, and political ideology) and compositional factors (e.g., marketized mentality, religious and ethical values) shape anti-immigrant attitudes across 62 countries. Drawing on data from Wave 7 of the World Values Survey (2017–2022), encompassing over 94,000 individuals, this study contributes to ongoing debates about migrant agency and societal perceptions in a restrictive policy environment. Using Principal Component Analysis and Item Response Theory, we developed multidimensional scales to measure perceived immigration threat. A Multilevel Gaussian Model with mixed-effects was then employed to account for both individual- and group-level variation in responses. Findings reveal that while perceived threat of immigration remains generally low across the sample, large inter-country differences persist. Individuals with a marketized mentality or high self-satisfaction tend to perceive immigration more positively. Interestingly, religiosity limits support for immigration in relation to national development, even though religious beliefs alone may foster interpersonal tolerance. Additionally, institutional imbalance, age, maternal citizenship, and valuation of science and technology emerge as significant predictors. Our study highlights how global political and cultural structures interact with personal values to shape public perceptions of immigrants. In doing so, it offers nuanced insight into how restrictive or enabling social environments influence migrant experiences, aspirations, and belonging across national contexts.

2. *Established migrant women facing recent migration: Defensive and reflective symbolic boundaries*

Carolina Ramírez (Universidad Central de Chile)

Abstract: Established migrants in different destination countries have witnessed diversification processes caused by the arrival of new migrants in their areas of residence. However, their perspectives on recent migration have been overshadowed by a focus on the positions of the native population. Based on ethnographic interviews with middle-aged Peruvian migrant women (55-65 years old) who arrived in Chile in the 1990s and 2000s, this article analyzes the perceptions that established migrant women hold of newly arrived migrants. It reveals a process of constructing symbolic boundaries that we call defensive and reflective boundaries. These mechanisms describe interdependent processes of differentiation and closure, as well as identification and openness towards others. This is an ambivalent process where forms of differentiation are nuanced or contextualized in relation to their own, often persistent, experiences of exclusion/inclusion, and are shaped by meso and macrostructural factors in which their lives are embedded and which influence their social positioning. Specifically, we analyze these processes within a scenario marked by persistent and growing exclusion, control measures, and stigmas faced by migrant populations. In dialogue with studies on the construction of symbolic boundaries in migratory contexts, this article sheds light on the complex experiences and attitudes of established south-south migrant women who are growing older in destination countries amid a climate of increasing hostility towards migration.

3. *Framing immigration in times of economic crisis: Liberal and conservative strategies on X in Canada's 2025 election*

Morteza Shams (Toronto Metropolitan University); Masoud Kianpour (Toronto Metropolitan University); Rupa Banerjee (Toronto Metropolitan University)

Abstract: In recent years, Canada has experienced significant economic challenges, including rising housing costs, increasing unemployment rates, and a decline in welfare and social services. These developments have generated substantial domestic criticism of the ruling Liberal Party. Among the most prominent critiques, particularly from the right-wing Conservative Party, the Liberal Party's main rival, were concerns over the high intake of immigrants. The political landscape became further destabilized with the resignation of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau ahead of the election, coupled with the onset of a U.S. trade war and tariff increases under the Trump administration. Together, these factors elevated immigration into a central and contentious issue in Canadian political discourse. Following its re-election in 2025, the Liberal Party sought to regain public support by introducing a new wave of restrictive immigration laws. Against this backdrop, this study positions itself at the intersection of communication and diaspora studies. Employing qualitative methods, the study combines social media content analysis and Netnography research conducted over four months (two months before and after the April 28 election). The research will address two questions: 1) How did the Liberal and Conservative parties represent the "immigration crisis" on their X (Twitter) homepages, and in what ways was this representation deployed as a tool of political propaganda and campaign strategy? 2) How did the general public react to these digital representations on X, and how did they interpret the relationship between

Canada's economic crisis and the issue of immigration? All collected data will be systematically analyzed using MAXQDA software.

4. *Romanian euroscepticism at home and abroad: Does individuals' experience of migration make a difference?*

Alin Croitoru (Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu); Georgian Guțoiu (Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu)

Abstract: A series of factors have contributed to a recent reevaluation of the relationship between Romania and the European Union (EU) among large segments of this country's population, and Eurosceptic discourse has gained momentum on the public agenda. While most studies analyze Euroscepticism as a form of sympathy or attachment towards the European Union, less attention was paid in the scholarship on how individuals view the relationship between their country and the EU. We propose a model for analyzing Euroscepticism of Romanians by considering how people evaluate the extent to which the EU has benefited more from its relationship with the country at the country's expense. This perspective is highly important today, as the growing number of successful Eurosceptic political parties build their discourse on their countries perceived loser status within the Union. To explore these views, we utilize data collected through a survey conducted in 2025 with a sample of 1350 Romanians (800 living in the country and 550 Romanian migrants living in other European countries). Our results indicate important reminiscences of how the individuals' think that COVID-19 pandemic was managed by authorities, significant effects of the perceived state's support to refugees from Ukraine, as well as the importance of individuals' experience of international migration in shaping Romanians' perceptions on the relationship between their country and the EU. Considering demographic, socio-economic, and attitudinal variables, our study documents a higher level of Euroscepticism both among Romanians living in other EU countries and returned migrants compared to Romanians who never lived abroad.

5. *The nation as border: Nationalism and structural exclusion in contentious migration governance*

Marika Jeziorek (Wilfrid Laurier University)

Abstract: This paper examines how nationalism functions as a spatial and symbolic infrastructure that actively produces borders beyond the territorial edge of the state. In the context of intensifying ideological polarization and illiberal politics, it argues that migration governance is increasingly shaped not only by law or security, but by everyday nationalist practices that draw moral boundaries around the national community. Focusing on Poland between 2021 and 2025, the paper traces how public discourse, civic rituals, and conservative religious narratives work to legitimize exclusionary migration politics under the guise of cultural defense. Through media analysis and public statements surrounding events like the 2025 anti-migrant demonstrations and the rise of Ruch Obrony Granic, the study reveals how migrants are cast as symbolic threats to "our women," "our values," and the imagined purity of Polishness. Building on migration studies, critical geography and feminist international relations, the paper theorizes nationalism as a non-territorial border infrastructure—a diffuse and affective force that shapes policy, public sentiment, and migrant experiences. It engages the conference theme by situating nationalism as a central driver of contentious migration politics, while also exploring how symbolic bordering practices influence migrants' lived experiences. This contribution offers conceptual novelty by reframing nationalism as a bordering mechanism, and methodological value through its integration of media and discourse analysis with affect theory. It also raises reflexive questions about how researchers and civil society actors can respond to exclusionary narratives without reinforcing the very logics they seek to challenge.

PANEL 23 (ONLINE):

MIGRANT AGENCY, RESISTANCE, AND THE POLITICS OF RECOGNITION

Chair: Eleanor Y.T. Chan (Kyushu University)

Discussant: Judit Kende (Tilburg University)

1. *Living with double contention: Iranian adults confronting discrimination abroad and political repression at home*

Farnaz Hashemnia (Otto-von-Guericke-University Magdeburg)

Abstract: Iranian migrants face "double contention": pervasive anti-immigrant politics in Europe alongside authoritarian repression from Iran, their country of origin. This precarious situation creates dual vulnerability, making them a critical case for understanding contemporary migration dynamics.

Existing research often examines host-country discrimination or transnational authoritarianism separately, yet rarely explores their profound intersection and compounded effects on migrants' well-being, trust in institutions, and political participation. This study specifically addresses that critical gap. The central research question is, how do Iranian adults experience and navigate the dual pressures of anti-immigrant exclusion in Europe and transnational authoritarian repression from Iran? Sub-questions delve into their encounters with discrimination and racialization, the influence of the Iranian state abroad, their coping and resistance strategies, and how these contexts shape their migration aspirations and sense of belonging. Employing a qualitative research design based on intensive interviews with Iranian adults in Germany, the study utilizes constructivist grounded theory to build understanding inductively. Analysis employs lenses of boundary-making, everyday forms of resistance, and transnational migration politics. Expected findings will illuminate the impacts on well-being, trust in institutions, and orientations toward political participation, revealing identity strategies such as retreatism, essentialism, and engagement. The anticipation is to uncover diverse coping and resistance strategies, including selective visibility, digital activism, and solidarity networks. This research significantly contributes to debates on migration governance, migrant agency under illiberalism, and the intersection of migration governance with authoritarian export, advancing comparative discussions on how migrants from authoritarian regimes navigate Europe's contentious political climate.

2. *Waiting for years and feeling stuck: The burdens of navigating the political asylum system in contemporary South Africa*

Pineteh Angu (University of Pretoria)

Abstract: In South Africa, the 'influx' of migrants and porous borders have become a frequent political narrative employed by politicians and activists on different media platforms. Whilst the ruling party uses it to deflect the attention of desperate and unemployed South Africans from failed political promises, the opposition parties/activists employ the narrative to sway political support or to spark xenophobic violence. In the South African asylum system in particular, this narrative is accompanied by subtle forms of bureaucratic violence. One example of these forms of bureaucratic violence is time, characterized by unusual and deliberate delays to interview and process asylees' applications. Here, time is a strategy used to frustrate asylum seekers and position them in limbo permanently while their temporary permits lapse. In other words, time places asylees in a state of permanent temporariness and unearths forms of victimization of refugees/asylum seekers in South Africa. This article analyses interviews from refugees/asylum seekers, interpreters and Refugee Status Determination Officers (RSDO) to understand how forms of bureaucratic violence intersect with such a narrative to place asylum seekers in a state of wait-hood and stuckness as well as in state of precarity and vulnerability. I argue that on the one hand they are designed to frustrate, control and contained an imaginary migration crisis through unlawful arrests. On the other hand, they create opportunities for asylum seekers to exercise their sense of agency by finding creative and imaginative ways to live illegal or to change their permits and reside permanently in South Africa.

3. *Between a rock and a hard place: Portugal's claiming and casting out of Lusophone immigrants*

Inês Mendes de Sousa (University of Bristol)

Abstract: This paper investigates how the experiences of Lusophone immigrants – as postcolonial subjects and economic migrants – are shaped by the current contentious context in Portugal. On one hand, the country claims immigrants from its former colonies as part of an imagined Lusophone community, tied together by a shared language, history, and culture. This serves to sustain apologist and denialist narratives around colonialism and its legacies. On the other, amid a political shift to the right, Lusophone immigrants are often cast out as targets of rising anti-immigrant sentiment and increasingly restrictive migration policies. This exposes not only the hypocrisy behind said narratives but also the conditionality of Lusophone immigrants' inclusion – leaving them stuck between a rock and a hard place. Drawing on a collaborative poetic inquiry with 18 participants, conducted in Lisbon (May 2025) and resulting in 90 poetic responses, I highlight how the lived realities of Lusophone immigrants clash with Portugal's self-image as a culturally hybrid, racially tolerant nation. Combining collaborative poetry workshops with unstructured follow-up interviews, this innovative methodological approach enables participants' involvement in research "as writers of poems based on their experiences" (Manning, 2018), thus centring immigrant narratives. The writing and sharing of poetry allows participants not only to react to and reflect on problematic national narratives, but also to resist these by exercising their agency. Situated within broader debates on postcolonial immigration and knowledge production, this paper

reveals how Lusophone immigrants perceive and navigate the contradictory terms of their belonging in Portuguese society.

4. *Between home and the world: The role of migrants in organizing anti-war protests*

Agnieszka Lewczuk (University of Warsaw); Svitlana Romaniuk (University of Warsaw)

Abstract: This presentation examines how Ukrainian migrant communities shape and organize anti-war protests in Poland and South Korea, operating between the realities of their home country and the host state. The protests were triggered by the outbreak of war in Ukraine on 24 February 2022 and the resulting mass migration of Ukrainians. Using the example of protests organized by migrants from Ukraine as well as the Ukrainian diaspora, the study investigates linguistic and non-linguistic strategies—such as slogans, songs, posters, and video materials—employed to mobilize support, counter propaganda, and build transnational networks of solidarity in the face of Russian aggression against Ukraine. Drawing on discourse analysis and social movement theory, the paper shows how migrants adapt their messaging to resonate across different cultural and political contexts, creating hybrid communicative spaces that amplify anti-war voices on a global scale.

5. *Afghan newcomers bravely overcoming barriers to higher education*

Sofia Noori (University of British Columbia)

Abstract: The global north is experiencing a contentious context marked by anti-immigrant policies and sentiments, reshaping how migrants move, settle, and seek opportunities. This paper examines how Afghan newcomers demonstrate quiet resistance by pursuing higher education in British Columbia, Canada. It draws on four in-depth interviews and survey data from 70 respondents, all part of a community-based study initiated by Afghan women (who arrived in Canada after the Taliban takeover in 2021). These women identified access to higher education as a pressing concern and collaborated in designing and conducting the research. Informed by postcolonial and strength-based frameworks, the study highlights the agency of participants who successfully navigated the application, enrolment, and coursework phases. Findings show that newcomers rely heavily on self-directed research and verbal communication with post-secondary staff, often due to limited access to formal support networks. Their deep motivation to achieve academic goals reflects a strong investment in building stable lives and contributing to Canadian society. The study offers policy and practice recommendations directly from Afghan newcomers to improve access for all. Their actions including initiating this research study, advocating for change, and forging strong community ties, reveal collective resilience and agency in the face of systemic barriers. This paper aligns with the conference's second theme by showcasing how migrants respond to hostile conditions. The participants' drive to succeed despite structural constraints illustrates not only personal determination but also a growing sense of belonging and empowerment within Canadian educational and social contexts.

PANEL 24 (ONLINE):

LANGUAGE, FAITH, BELONGING, AND RESILIENCE ACROSS BORDERS

Chair: Martine El Ouardi (Université de Lausanne)

Discussant: Aida Ibričević (REMESO, Linköping University)

1. *Malayalee Hamlas of the Arab Gulf: Migrant-pilgrims and their spatial and socio-religious mobility*

Mamdooch Abdul Fathah (Columbia University)

Abstract: Hegemonic frameworks of decolonization in the Third World have recast Hajj from a trans-imperial practice into a geopolitical enterprise governed by nation-states through pilgrim quotas and national carriers. As states assumed financial and security responsibility, instituting nationally negotiated regulations, pilgrims increasingly journeyed as 'religious' subjects of the nation, and Hajj became a national event. This coincided with the rise of linear, time-compressed pilgrimage, detached from historical intersections with itinerant preaching, labor, or contemporary migrant mobility. Drawing on ethnographic research among Malayalee Muslim migrants in Saudi Arabia—conceived as "partial societies" formed by migrant externality—and their organization of pilgrimage hamlas, this paper interrogates dominant narratives of pilgrimage. I ask how Malayalees in Gulf hamlas disaggregate and reassemble mobility outside nationalist geography and position mobility beyond the binary of 'religious' pilgrim versus 'economic' migrant. I explore this through the conceptual space of the Mīqāts of Hajj/Umrah, ritual stations marking entry into ihram. Mīqāts rely on pre-modern vector-based

geography, emphasizing direction and movement rather than national origin, and are inhabited by migrant laborers, visitors, and Gulf natives alike. Engaging this older centripetal logic, I reveal a transformed spatial constitution of Hajj/Umrah, inclusive of partial societies like Malayalee migrants and their expansive mobility. In the central analysis, I trace the peculiar socio-religious mobility Malayalee migrants pursue: spiritually following the Mīqāt's archetypal paths while navigating their structural position as subjects of transnational capital, restrictive Gulf labor regimes, and global Malayalees who contribute to home and rearticulate traditional Sunnism, often quietly challenging the Salafī-dominated Gulf public sphere.

2. *Taking refuge in faith: Religious communities, sponsorship, and belonging in Canada*
Sanam Vaghefi (Capilano University)

Abstract: This study explores how Jewish and Christian religious communities in Canada engage in refugee sponsorship, reception, and integration, drawing on the perspectives of both displaced individuals and faith-based actors. While the research focuses primarily on Ukrainian refugees of Jewish and Christian backgrounds, it also includes reflections from religious leaders who have supported other groups, such as Kurdish Syrians. Based on fieldwork conducted with two synagogues and three churches, the study examines how religious networks shape the everyday conditions of refugee settlement, including access to housing, social support, community belonging, and cultural continuity. In a political climate where immigration is increasingly debated and notions of inclusion are being redefined, the study considers how faith-based communities position themselves in relation to broader social narratives and shifting public attitudes. It also explores how refugees navigate both the material and relational aspects of support within these settings—spaces that may offer welcome, but also carry expectations around gratitude, participation, and belonging. Methodologically, the research draws on qualitative interviews and grounded, sociologically informed analysis. It contributes to growing discussions on the role of non-state actors in refugee reception, and on how moral boundaries and solidarities are negotiated at the community level. By focusing on everyday interactions and forms of care, the study sheds light on how people—both newcomers and hosts—construct meaning, navigate ambiguity, and build connection within local faith-based responses to displacement.

3. *Church asylum as a space for negotiation: Ideas for space-sensitive social work*
Katrin Hermesen (Universität Münster); Onno Husen (Universität Münster)

Abstract: The term “church asylum” refers to the central role of (Christian) church buildings in connection with social practices as places of refuge from state action in Germany. This practice is grounded on the recognition of church space as a sacred space (Schmidt 2021: 268) and enables the review of legal status with the aim of remaining in the nation state (Gölzer 2023: 327). A relational understanding of space makes it possible to examine the underlying practices and processes of the creation, reproduction, and negotiation of spaces such as church asylum, as well as the actors involved in spatial interaction. In addition, levels of power and hierarchy become clear (Werner/Piechura/Bormann 2024: 22f.). So-called threatened, attempted, or executed “evictions” from church asylums, such as in September 2024 in Hamburg, Germany, point to the spatial arrangement and the uncertainty of the safe space. These evictions have recently increased (ÖBAG 2024: n.p.). It is therefore also a contested space, as reflected in the positions taken by state and non-state actors and people seeking protection. Based on our article (Hermesen/Husen 2025, forthcoming), we examine church asylum from a spatial theory perspective and highlight ideas for spatially sensitive social work in the negotiation of space in contentious times.

4. *Between languages and borders: Ukrainian refugee children's multilingual worlds in visual narratives*
Magdalena Olpińska-Szkielko (University of Warsaw); Svitlana Romaniuk (University of Warsaw); Zoia Adamia (Georgian International University)

Abstract: The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 triggered mass forced migration across Europe, primarily involving women and school-aged children. This large-scale displacement unfolded in a highly politicised context, where migration governance and refugee reception are central to public debate. Within this environment, the integration of Ukrainian refugees—especially children—raises key issues around language policy, identity, and inclusive education. This paper presents findings from Ukrainian Children in Poland and Georgia: My Multilingual World (2023–2025), a project exploring how young refugees perceive and navigate multilingual realities in two countries with contrasting migration and integration approaches. Using a qualitative, child-centred method, the study analyses

around 60 drawings by Ukrainian children to explore their awareness of multiple languages, attitudes toward host-country languages (Polish and Georgian), and identity formation. Despite rising anti-immigrant rhetoric in parts of Europe, children often express neutral or positive views of multilingualism, incorporating new languages alongside Ukrainian and/or Russian. However, their perceptions vary depending on the sociolinguistic and political context of each country—reflecting broader differences in migration governance and public sentiment. By centring children’s visual narratives, this research underscores the importance of including refugee voices in policy and educational planning. It also shows how young migrants exercise agency and construct a sense of belonging within contested spaces. Ultimately, the study sheds light on how politicised migration contexts shape not only policy but also the everyday lives and aspirations of refugee children.

5. *Resilience through language: Navigating integration and belonging among Ukrainian refugees in Romania*

Denisa-Maria Bâlc (Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu)

Abstract: In times of crisis, language becomes more than a tool for communication — it transforms into a bridge to belonging, identity, and resilience. This study explores the role of language assimilation in the integration process of Ukrainian refugees in Romania, emphasizing their perception of the Romanian language and culture amid forced displacement caused by the Russian invasion. Drawing on approximately 100 questionnaire responses from both Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian migrants, complemented by discourse analysis, the research investigates how language and cultural perceptions evolve across two critical phases: pre-migration and in-migration. The findings reveal a marked contrast between Ukrainian refugees and other migrant groups. For Ukrainians, the urgency of displacement and the desire for community cohesion elevate language learning to a vital strategy for rebuilding a sense of stability and belonging. Their narratives reflect emotional resilience and proactive adaptation despite the abrupt rupture of war. In contrast, non-Ukrainian migrants often exhibit a more transactional or temporary approach to integration, influenced by different motivations and trajectories. By comparing these distinct experiences, the study sheds light on how migrants interpret, negotiate, and sometimes resist linguistic and cultural integration in host societies. Ultimately, the research underscores the importance of tailoring integration policies to reflect the diverse needs and resilience strategies of migrant communities, especially those emerging from crisis contexts. Such insights are essential in designing inclusive frameworks that not only address linguistic competence but also foster long-term social belonging in an era marked by displacement and shifting identities.

PANEL 25 (ONLINE):

(UN)MAKING CITIZENSHIP: PRIVILEGE, EXCLUSION, AND BELONGING

Chair: Francisca Sassetti (Royal Holloway University of London & UNESCO Chair in ICT4D)

Discussant: Anastasia Bermúdez Torres (University of Seville)

1. *Constructing exclusion: Executive actions and the racialized boundaries of citizenship in the United States*

Madri Hall-Faul (University of Kentucky); Brittany Lynch (Iona University); Gilean Chikwati (University of Kentucky); Kathryn Libal (University of Connecticut)

Abstract: In its first ten days in office, the Trump administration in the United States issued 13 immigration-related executive orders and proclamations that suspended refugee resettlement and framed migration across the Southern border as an “invasion.” These orders exemplify how political agendas construct boundaries of belonging, defining who is entitled to membership within a society and who is excluded. Such constructions extend beyond legal status to shape identity, economic participation, and access to rights. This paper examines how the executive orders and regulations issued by the Trump administration discursively enforced exclusion and redefined citizenship. Whereas much analysis has focused on the legal consequences of these orders, we demonstrate how discourse itself enacts exclusion. Drawing on critical discourse analysis, which views language as a site of power, we analyze the executive actions issued during the first six months of the administration. We ask how executive discourse legitimates the denial of rights and constructs citizenship, inclusion, and belonging. We find that the Trump administration’s executive actions relied on dehumanization and othering to justify militarized enforcement, exclusion, and policies violating domestic and human rights law. These orders frame migration as a matter of national security rather than a humanitarian one, enforcing what some have

called a “global apartheid” that reinforces racialized citizenship and belonging in the Global North. We argue that examining executive discourse is essential to understanding how migration governance produces social inequalities and reconfigures citizenship.

2. *Contradicting processes of migrantization and citizenisation: Analyzing the extent of a nationality privilege in the context of French migration in Quebec, Canada*

Capucine Coustere (Concordia University)

Abstract: Most literature on migrantization and citizenisation focuses on the former. This paper proposes examining a case of migration facilitation, in which state policies aim at facilitating rather than restricting the migration and settlement of specific categories of migrants, to empirically examine to what extent those migrants are citizenised. It takes the case of French temporary migration to Quebec, the only French-speaking province of Canada, owing to its colonization by France. Since the 1960s, France and Quebec have signed numerous agreements, many of which intend to increase and facilitate migration. As temporary residents’ numbers have risen in the province, so have those of French nationality. Thanks to the agreements, however, the latter benefits from more formally advantageous conditions to migrate and settle in the province. Yet, in a context of rising polarization around immigration in the province, immigration policies have become more unstable and restrictive since 2018. Based on qualitative longitudinal research, the article aims at analyzing to what extent French nationals benefit from nationality privilege when migrating to Quebec. Results show that while the regime of immigration facilitation does contribute to citizenise them, they are still faced with contradictory fears, events, sequences and processes of migrantization stemming from shifting and restrictive immigration policies. Conceptually and empirically, the paper contributes to better understanding how contradicting technologies of citizenisation and migrantization affect people’s experiences from a temporal lens and to improve knowledge on the extent to which regimes of migration facilitation based on nationality succeed in attracting and retaining migrants.

3. *Rehearsing citizenship: Enclave platforms for voice, visibility, and belonging*

Michelle Medved (Indiana University Bloomington)

Abstract: This study explores the role that an ethnic enclave plays in migrant resettlement, community-building, and civic participation. Set in Dearborn, Michigan, the most highly concentrated area of Arab Americans in the US, this research investigates the relationships between an immigrant-created community, its institutions and resources, and its activism. Due to the ethnic enclave’s population and institutions, there is greater support for certain social and political views than in other parts of the US, where Arab migrants may face discrimination. Thus, the study setting is rich with opportunities for protecting and advocating for Arab and immigrant rights, commemoration of transnational events, and overall greater representation for several intersecting marginalized groups. Utilizing a spatially focused ethnographic methodology that includes participant observation and stakeholder interviews, this study seeks to capture the unique possibilities of this setting. In a time of rising xenophobia and uneven enforcement of immigration policy in the US, this research centers on migrants’ voices and strategies for resettlement and civic participation through civil society, education, and community events. Additionally, Dearborn and its surrounding cities increasingly have voted Arab Americans into governing positions –yielding the only Palestinian American member of Congress, the first all-Muslim city council in the country, and the first Arab American mayor of Dearborn. This paper contributes to the conference’s themes by demonstrating how migrants in an ethnic enclave react to and organize around transnational events and migration politics, detailing transferable strategies for educators, civic organizations, and community organizers to support migrants’ agency and political engagement.

4. *Temporary lives and the lived experience of Danish immigrants*

Signe Carlsen (Aarhus University)

Abstract: In this paper, I study how temporariness is experienced amongst immigrants in Denmark, and the implications of the potential experience of temporariness for their civic integration and experience of agency regarding life decisions. Across Western societies, debates about the reception of immigrants and the requirements to ask of them continue to loom at large. Denmark is an especially restrictive case regarding the reception of immigrants as restrictive policies on permanent residency and citizenship results in long term temporary residency permits for immigrants. Paradoxically, the legal and societal expectation is that the immigrant adheres to country specific civic citizenship ideals. Situated in Denmark, the study is based on in-depth narrative biographical interviews with immigrants with

temporary and permanent residency permit, allowing for insights into different temporal phases, and thereby exploring the perspective of the immigrant. The interviews are conducted with immigrants from Ukraine who've arrived after the Russian invasion in 2022 and immigrants from the Middle East, an especially politicized group in Danish immigration policies. I theorize that prolonged temporariness affects civic integration and integration practices, as residency circumstances influence experiences of agency to affect one's life course, including the potential for a more secure residency permit in Denmark. The paper contributes to the literature and knowledge about the lived experiences of immigrants in precarious legal situations and contentious host societies, how the immigrants experience time and temporariness, and how these experiences can be understood in the context of civic integration and citizenship.

5. *Not welcome (anymore): Self-identification and belonging among displaced Ukrainians in Germany, Poland and Hungary*

Kseniia Shvets (Free University Berlin)

Abstract: When the full-scale invasion of Ukraine began in February 2022, the EU immediately opened its borders to Ukrainians fleeing the war. The Temporary Protection Directive, invoked in March 2022, granted them rights comparable to those of permanent residents, while institutional support and grassroots hospitality ensured a uniquely warm welcome. However, almost four years later, the situation is rapidly changing. In Germany, displaced Ukrainians are repeatedly presented as a burden to the economy. In Poland and Hungary, both economic and historical contentions are used by right-wing actors to incite anti-Ukrainian attitudes among local population. I aim to explore how these ambivalent attitudes have affected the self-identification of displaced Ukrainians throughout their stay in these host countries. This work is based on a longitudinal qualitative panel conducted yearly with displaced Ukrainians in Berlin, Warsaw and Budapest in 2022-2025 (54, 25 and 10 respondents respectively as of 2025). The analysis of 4 waves of interviews provides valuable insight into how self-identification and sense of belonging are challenged and sometimes completely hijacked by the illiberalisation of narratives in host societies. While some displaced Ukrainians find solace in community and solidarity, others attempt to justify the negative categorizations by allocating blame onto fellow co-ethnics or other refugee groups. Using Floya Anthias's (2018) framework, I approach identity and belonging as processual and deeply contextual. When previously non-threatening social hierarchies are enacted, individuals have to contend with less permeable boundaries or engage in boundary-making themselves to ensure their own – even if illusory – acceptance and security.

WEDNESDAY, 18 MARCH 2026
09:00-10:30 CET

PANEL 26 (ON-SITE, Building L5, Floor 1, Room 1/1):

UNIC-MITIME@IMISCOE SESSION: TEMPORALITIES OF MIGRATION: NARRATIVES, PRECARITIES, AND URBAN TRANSFORMATIONS

Chair: Audrey Paradis (University of Oulu)

Discussant: Gorka Urrutia Asua (University of Deusto)

1. *Temporal precarity: Precarious migrant workers and diverging temporalities in urban labour markets*

Margit Fauser (Ruhr University Bochum); Katrin Menke (Ruhr University Bochum)

Abstract: This contribution develops an understanding of “temporal precarity” that reflects precarious labour market position, strict border and migration regimes, urban and transnational inequalities, and resulting temporal uncertainties. It is specifically interested in migrants’ strategies and practices of resilience and resistance to permanent or time-related precarity. It thus furthers our understanding of migrants’ contestations admits multiple contentious contexts. Migrants’ labour market integration is generally conceptualised as a long-term, settlement-oriented project and employment-related social security frameworks follow on the same logic. At the same time, temporal migration has been growing due to the demands of flexible labour markets’ demands, corresponding border regimes and their legal regulation, as well as because of migrants’ own desires and agencies. Temporal migration is further entangled with diverging temporalities at the workplace and in urban everyday life. Yet, there is often a mismatch between the different individual and familial, political, and economic temporalities that migrants’ need to adapt to but can also shape, or try to circumvent. These temporalities may influence or may remain ignored by employers and other, institutional actors and the temporal regimes and orders they impose. These challenges are differently reflected in urban migration histories, contemporary re-development processes and imagination of urban futures. Using insights from our own research projects, and other existing studies, this talk elaborates on temporal precarity in times of heightened political and societal contestation to bring debates on the temporal turn in migration studies into dialogue with labour markets and work, and their interconnections with urban transformation and transition.

2. *Contentious times: Suspended connectivities, migrant temporalities and the urban social*

Roger Norum (University of Oulu); Audrey Paradis (University of Oulu)

Abstract: Given the increasingly contentious nature of migration in Europe, scholars must increasingly contend with the temporal-focused (and often temporary) aspects of everyday mobile lives. This paper argues that temporal in/security—the experience of uncertain, suspended, or fragmented presents and futures—fundamentally shapes migrants’ ability to forge social connections. Drawing on preliminary theoretical work, we seek to understand how precarious legal status, unstable employment, and unequal access to digital infrastructures together structure migrants’ everyday encounters. Temporal conditions delimit who can access social and material networks, how solidarities are formed across difference, and what forms of sociality and conviviality are imaginable in urban life. By foregrounding the lived experience of temporal disjunctures via what we refer to as the “contingent present”, the paper shows how migrants’ social worlds are marked not only by spatial displacements but also by ruptures of lived time that fragment both present interactions and future aspirations. At the same time, by seeing connectivity as a spatio-temporally contingent practice and process, we hope to highlight emergent practices of resilience and care. These might comprise, for example, migrants and other urban residents using digital technologies to sustain community, navigate precarious work, and claiming a sense of belonging in the city — even as these practices may well be constrained concomitantly by politicized agendas, structural inequalities and regulatory regimes.

3. *Placemaking in migration through a temporality lens*

Caitriona Ni Laoire (University College Cork); Mastoureh Fathi (University College Cork)

Abstract: A growing wealth of research shows how placemaking, or the process of making a place meaningful, is important in migration contexts. Although placemaking inherently incorporates recognition of the role of temporality, the ways in which practices of placemaking are influenced by time and

temporality regimes has not attracted much attention. Migrant placemaking involves engagement with the past, present and future – migrants, as individuals and communities, embed memories and past experiences into how they make places meaningful in the present, a process also bound up with future hopes, anticipations and plans. These placemaking processes take place in the context of social structures, family, community and diasporic relationships unfolding over time, as well as migration regimes and borderscapes which impose their own temporal restrictions. In current contentious times, migrant placemaking may be key to managing the temporal uncertainties of rapidly changing borders, statuses and (im)possibilities of settlement. In this paper, we present a temporalities perspective to progress research on placemaking in migration in contentious times, focusing on three key axes of analysis: first, how migrants construct home when temporalities of migrant biographies conflict with rapidly changing temporalities of migration regimes and settlement/mobility (im)possibilities; second, the role of temporalities of border crossing, transnational processes and sites of convergence and divergence in shaping place, belonging and lived experience of migrants; and third, how collective diasporic identifications are constructed, negotiated and mobilised through temporalities of memory and future-making in and beyond destination places.

4. *Time and narratives of migration in political discourse and artistic practice: The case of Liège*
Elsa Mescoli (University of Liège); Jean-Michel Lafleur (University of Liège); Shannon Damery (University of Liège)

Abstract: In this presentation, we will discuss how time is embedded within the production and negotiation of migration narratives by different social actors in urban contexts, paying attention to how these narratives contribute to, and challenge, controversial local debates on migration. At the institutional level, local governments can adopt different positions on migration issues - how they are framed and addressed - by engaging in discourses about the city's past, present and future. These discursive environments have a concrete impact on policies and practices relating to the immigration process, which, in turn, influence the lived experiences of individuals. In particular, the temporality of immigration-related processes and the resulting changes in status affect access to rights as well as concrete possibilities for expression and action. Migrants who experience processes of discursive and empirical exclusion and inclusion in the city over time elaborate personal and collective narratives that interact with the city's institutional discourse, making visible the lived experience of individuals. The city of Liège will serve as a case study to demonstrate how it has developed a contemporary sanctuary approach to migration issues based on memories of its multicultural past, and how this approach is shaping a hoped-for inclusive future. Moreover, through an analysis of the theatrical production of a collective of undocumented migrants in the city, we will emphasise how the arts enable migrants to recount the impact of time on their pre-departure imaginations, daily challenges, and future aspirations.

5. *The governance of migration complexities: The relation between migration temporalities and governance temporalities*

Peter Scholten (Erasmus University Rotterdam)

Abstract: One of the central themes in the 'mobility turn' in migration studies is that temporalities of migration have become more complex. Some scholars speak of 'liquid migration' or forms of mobility that are increasingly uncertain, fluid and individual. From a complexity perspective, this paper connects migration temporalities to governance temporalities. How and why do complex migration temporalities challenges governance temporalities? This relates to a variety of policy approaches, including but not limited to what is labelled as migration or 'inclusion' policy. To what extent do policies manage to respond to uncertain, fluid and individual temporalities? What practices are there in European cities, including Rotterdam, Liege and Cork? And what complications does governance encounter from a complexity perspective; does policy manage to respond to complexity, or is policy a factor behind complexity?

PANEL 27 (ON-SITE, Building L5, Floor 1, Room 1/6):

CONTROLLING MIGRATION: POLICIES OF DEPARTURE, RETURN, AND INCLUSION IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Chair: Angeliki Konstantinidou (University of Liège)

Discussant: Hassan Boussetta (University of Liège)

1. *Denied departure: Mapping emigration bans in Asia and Africa 1960-2023*

Flor Vandeveld (Ghent University); Polina Koriukina (Ghent University)

Abstract: Emigration policies play a crucial role in shaping international mobility but have been largely overlooked in existing migration policy indicators, which focus almost exclusively on immigration. This paper introduces the Emigration Ban Indicator (EBI), a novel measure capturing emigration bans across 25 Asian and African countries from 1960 to 2023. The EBI comprises seven subindicators: occupation bans, domestic worker bans, military conscription bans, gender-specific bans targeting men or women, general bans, and other bans, coded for both presence and population coverage. Bilateral versions account for destination-specific bans. Analysis reveals that - in contrast to widespread belief - emigration bans have not declined over time; rather, broad population-wide bans have given way to more targeted restrictions, particularly by occupation. Ban types vary by region: domestic worker bans are most common in Southeast Asia, while military service-related bans are concentrated in Africa. The EBI offers a new tool for studying origin-country restrictions and contributes to broader debates on immobility and migration governance. This research is particularly fitting for the conference theme, since it studies migration policies and governance from the often overlooked perspective of origin countries. Furthermore, it focuses on the most restrictive kind of emigration policies, emigration bans. Such bans completely restrict individuals from leaving the country and can have important societal implications.

2. *Inclusion or exclusion? Government ideologies, public opinion and policy response in the face of forced migration*

Giacomo Solano (RUNOMI, Radboud University)

Abstract: As global migration flows intensify, some scholars argue that rising numbers of asylum seekers and refugees provoked an illiberal backlash. To challenge this assumption, this paper provides a fresh perspective on how forced migration dynamics shape integration policy changes. This paper employs data from the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX), covering 56 countries around the globe in the period 2014–2019. This period is particularly interesting, as it has been marked by ‘refugee’ crises both in Europe and in other regions, such as South America. We look at the change in policies between the two reference years. By means of regression analysis, we show that more refugees lead to an inclusive change in integration policies, while higher asylum requests result in restrictive changes. While public opinion and govern ideology had no effect on policy change, political ideology emerges as a moderator of the negative effect of asylum requests: left-leaning parliaments favor inclusivity, whereas right-leaning ones enforce restrictions. These findings challenge simplistic backlash narratives, highlighting the conditions under which migration drives inclusive or restrictive policy shifts.

3. *The politics of return: Immigration control, return enforcement, and irregular migration flows in EU/OECD countries*

Jiancheng Gu (Danube University Krems)

Abstract: We examine how immigration control policies in EU/OECD countries evolved in 2008-2018, and to what extent enforcement levels shape irregular migration flows. While the EU claimed that ineffective return systems incentivize irregular migration, empirical evidence on such “pull effects” of non-enforcement remains inconclusive. Examining both policy trajectories and their effects on migration pattern is important, given the politicization of migration during this period – particularly far-right parties using migration fears for electoral gain. We integrate three theories: Institutional Mechanism Theory, which highlights feedback between policies and migration patterns; Rational Choice Theory, which frames migrants’ decisions in cost-benefit terms; and Social Capital Theory, which explores if diaspora networks weaken deterrence. We hypothesize that countries with lower enforcement of return orders and more regularization alternatives attract higher levels of irregular migration, with this effect amplified where migrant networks are stronger. Empirically, we employ time-series cross-sectional gravity models analyzing migration flows to EU/OECD countries. Irregular migration is proxied through unauthorized entry detections and asylum applications. Variables from IMPIC, DEMIG-QuantMIG, or MIPEX construct composite indexes for restrictive policies (e.g., criminalization, detention, employer sanctions), alternatives to enforcement (e.g., amnesty programs, rights for irregular migrants), and governance capacity (e.g., biometric systems, alien registries). The analysis further incorporates enforcement outcomes (share of return orders enforced) alongside country-level economic, political, and sociocultural controls. Findings demonstrate the extent contentious politics have reshaped immigration control and the extent enforcement-based deterrence meaningfully influences migrant behavior. Results inform resource allocations between enforcement measures and longer-term strategies addressing root causes and fostering integration.

4. *Global citizens? Naturalisation policies as global conflicts of migration, nationalism and democracy*

Thomas Huddleston (University of Liège)

Abstract: Access to nationality is one of oldest and most studied areas of migration studies, although largely in Western democracies (Solano and Huddleston 2021). As a result, naturalisation policies are largely understood as responses to growing migrant populations and their politicisation. Yet the emergence of the Global Citizenship Observatory, with reports and indicators covering 191 countries (Vink et al. 2025), reveal puzzling regional variations that question the primacy of migration as the main explanatory factor. These policies may reflect broader socio-political dynamics and conflicts, meaning that immigrant citizenship may thus be equally—if not better—understood as a product of a country's inter-state conflict and struggle for democracy. Building on a wider theoretical literature and combining institutional and public opinion data, this unique, global multivariate analysis reviews these regional variations in ordinary naturalisation policies and then examines to what extent these are linked to past and present conflicts not only around migration, not also nationalism and democracy. The findings are considered in light of broader conceptualisations of immigrant citizenship from the literature, for example in terms of birthright citizenship and voting rights. Together, these conclusions help to inform the new, truly global research agenda on citizenship policies.

PANEL 28 (ON-SITE, Building L5, Ground floor, Room 0/3):

(IM)MOBILITIES, ASPIRATIONS, AND VULNERABILITIES IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

Chair: Ibtissame Bourhnane (University of Liège)

Discussant: Sofia Gaspar (CIES-Iscte)

1. *Futures on paper: Stalled mobilities, drifting aspirations, and tedious waiting among Nepalis in Portugal's (il)liberal documentation regime*

Josef Neubauer (University for Continuing Education Krems)

Abstract: Amid a broader European shift towards restrictionism, securitisation, and exclusion of immigrants, Portugal is often praised for its liberal policies on regularisation and citizenship. Yet, their implementation is mired in delays, whose impacts on migrants remain underexplored. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in Lisbon, this article investigates how the long wait for documentation—spanning regularisation, residence permits, family reunification, and citizenship—shapes mobilities and aspirations of Nepalis in Portugal. It shows how the lengthy process for the very documents promising mobility freedom and futures in Europe paradoxically stalls participants' social and spatial mobility. Many feel stuck in precarious jobs and living conditions, while their transnational mobility is deferred or obstructed, restricting visits to Nepal and moves elsewhere for better opportunities. These constraints extend to family members, entangling other geographies in the waiting process. The article then develops the concept of aspirational drift to capture how bureaucratic temporalities and stalled mobilities cause longer-term goals to gradually (1) drift out of sight into hazy horizons, (2) veer off course in new directions, or (3) oscillate between alternative futures. Still, some aspirations resist drift, anchored by hope, determination, obligation, and expectation. These insights advance scholarship on temporalities of migration, aspirations, and bureaucratic power, and add a critical perspective on Portugal's lauded immigration policies. They show how the country's liberal veneer erodes in practice, producing precarious lives and uncertain futures for those navigating its documentation regime.

2. *Staying where you are welcome? Host society reception climate and changes in Ukrainian refugees' secondary migration intentions*

Karelis Olivo Rumpf (Federal Institute for Population Research); Marcel Lubbers (Utrecht University)

Abstract: This study conceptualizes integration as a two-way process and highlights the role of the receiving society by investigating how regional political climate influences refugees' perceptions of welcome and discrimination, and how these perceptions, in turn, affect their secondary migration intentions – whether to stay in Germany, return to Ukraine, live transnationally, or move onward. This approach moves beyond earlier work on the importance of receiving-country conditions for refugees' migration decisions, primarily focused on structural integration factors. Much less is known about how the regional political climate and the social reception shape refugees' future mobility plans. Drawing on six waves of the BiB/FReDa-panel survey (August/October 2022–May 2025), we follow up to 9,277 Ukrainian refugee panelists who arrived in Germany after February 2022, comprising two cohorts sampled

in the first (n = 5,292) and fifth wave (n = 3,985). We link participants' county-level (Kreis) residence across all waves (N = 486) to contextual indicators such as regional far-right vote share. This allows us to assess how both regional variation (between-county differences) and temporal shifts (within-county differences) in the regional political climate shape refugees' perceived reception and, in turn, their secondary migration intentions. Using multilevel mixed-effects models, we integrate longitudinal survey data with contextual political and social indicators to advance understanding of the role of the receiving-society reception climate in driving Ukrainian refugees' mobility trajectories. The findings contribute to debates on the two-way process of integration and the role of host-society reception in return migration.

3. *Climate shocks and the aspiration to migrate: The role of livelihood viability*

Nicolás Caso (Ghent University)

Abstract: A fast-growing body of research documents associations between climate shocks and migration patterns. Recent work, however, has highlighted the need for greater attention to local contexts and the underlying mechanisms behind these associations. In particular, the pathways through which climate shocks influence migration decisions, and the selection of those who migrate, remains underexplored. This study addresses this gap by examining whether perceptions of livelihood viability mediates the link between climate shocks and internal and international migration aspirations, one of the often assumed mechanisms in most climate-migration nexus quantitative research. We test the mediation assumption by means of structural-equation mediation analysis on original survey data from 12,000 individuals across 25 communities in Africa and Asia. The results show divergent effects within the climate-livelihoods-migration nexus. Droughts do not have a significant effect on perceived livelihood viability but are directly associated with higher international migration aspirations. In contrast, floods reduce perceived livelihood viability, which in turn raises both internal and international migration aspirations. Contrary to common assumptions, these effects are more pronounced among individuals in affluent households and urban areas, rather than among rural, agricultural, or economically disadvantaged communities. These findings challenge dominant narratives from large-N studies that emphasize agricultural income loss as the main channel linking climate shocks to migration.

4. *Challenging the 'migration-for-safety' narrative: Gendered necropolitics and the continuum of violence in migrantized women's lives*

Paula Wallmeyer (University of Luxembourg)

Abstract: This article explores the ways in which European and German migration governance, characterized by securitization and border externalization, shapes the experiences of violence faced by migrantized women across borders. The study challenges the prevailing "migration-for-safety" narrative by demonstrating that women who flee authoritarian and illiberal contexts experience violence as a cross-border continuum. The analysis is based on ten in-depth interviews with women from Syria, Georgia, Turkey, and Iran, conducted in Germany as part of a multi-country project on gendered cross-border movements. The women's narratives illuminate how violence is experienced both before, during and after migration, and the manner in which these experiences intersect on multiple scales. The study employs Mbembe's concept of necropolitics and its gendered extensions (Puar, 2017; Islekel, 2021) to examine how hierarchies of human worth are reproduced in symbolic, structural and embodied forms of violence. Three themes emerged from the analysis: (1) Seeking security within shifting expectations of safety; (2) Imposed (im)mobility and loss of care networks; and (3) Gendered support networks and resilience. The findings reveal the manner in which gendered necropolitical logics operate across borders and scales, sustaining the disposability and debilitation of migrantized women. Additionally, the findings illustrate how migrantized women exercise agency by engaging in supportive and caring relationships that undermine the necropolitical "affirmation of non-existence" (Spivak, 1994, p. 102). By foregrounding the cross-border continuities of violence, the article contributes to debates on migration governance and gender-based violence in contentious times, offering a transnational perspective that moves beyond liberal/authoritarian divides.

5. *Building back home: Aspirations and social meanings of real estate investments among the Cameroonian diaspora in Belgium*

Ludovic Bakebek (University of Liège)

Abstract: Although established in Europe, Sub-Saharan immigrants often maintain strong attachments to their countries of origin. These ties are expressed through various forms of transnational investment, with real estate projects—such as the purchase of land, the construction or acquisition of houses, and the

commercialization of property—emerging as particularly significant. While frequently interpreted as markers of social success or as levers for urban development, these investments are also imbued with multiple aspirations and symbolic meanings. They reflect strategies of attachment to the homeland while simultaneously expressing a tension between return migration and the construction of life and identity in the host country. This tension is intensified both by political debates surrounding the figure of the migrant and by the progressive tightening of migration policies across many European nations. This paper focuses on the Cameroonian diaspora in Belgium to examine the aspirations and social meanings underpinning real estate investments in Cameroon. The analysis draws on qualitative research, including semi-structured interviews with “investor migrants” and participant observations within associations of individuals identifying with Cameroon, regardless of their current nationality. From a theoretical standpoint, this paper argues for situating migrants’ economic actions—not solely in terms of rational calculation, accumulation, or development—but within broader social, affective, and cultural logics.

PANEL 29 (ON-SITE, Building L5, Floor 1, Room 1/5):

MIGRATION CATEGORIES, RECOGNITION, AND THE POLITICS OF BELONGING

Chair: Ana Beatriz Pelicioni (University of Warsaw)

Discussant: Marco Martiniello (University of Liège)

1. *Lost in definition*

Fatima Silpagar (Vrije Universiteit Brussel); Tuba Bircan (Vrije Universiteit Brussel)

Abstract: The classification of ‘migrant’ varies substantially across countries, institutions, and datasets, leading to definitional inconsistencies that undermine the validity and comparability of migration statistics. These discrepancies could be shaped by demographic, legal, and socio-cultural criteria such as country of birth, citizenship, immigrant background, and duration of stay. They complicate both cross-national and longitudinal analyses. Far from being neutral, these classifications reflect political choices and societal debates about who is recognized as a migrant, whose presence is problematized, and whose rights are acknowledged. In a context where migration is highly politicised and statistical facts are mobilized in polarized debates, the construction of categories becomes a key site of debate. While the classification of migrants is central to statistical and policy frameworks, systematic examinations of these variations within large-scale European surveys remain limited. This study addresses this gap through a comparative review of major datasets. By systematically analysing survey documentation and, where available, conducting secondary data analyses, we identify the conceptual and operational criteria used to classify migrants, explore their divergences across member states, and assess their empirical impact on sample composition and reported outcomes. The findings point to persistent conceptual and technical fragmentation in the classification of migrants, highlighting the need for coherent and policy-relevant definitions to strengthen the robustness and comparability of European migration statistics.

2. *Refugees, aliens, foreigners and ‘illegal migrants’: Reinterpreting the right to nationality to challenge exclusionary policies in contentious post-colonial settings*

Anoshay Fazal (University of Liverpool)

Abstract: The drawing of borders and ensuing contested geopolitical typographies in the former Indian subcontinent intersect directly with the exclusionary policies that have since been consistently constructed and applied to populations in flux in postcolonial States including Pakistan. This paper utilises qualitative work conducted in Pakistan to narrate the plight of undocumented Pakistani-born descendants of Afghan refugees. Despite hosting the population for four decades, the absence of a formal legal framework to govern refugees unveils sustained contention shaped through the instrumentalisation of the citizenship regime and limiting policies, thereby excluding this population from jus soli citizenship and rendering them de facto stateless. The Afghan refugee population has thus been primarily governed under the colonial era Foreigners Act of 1946 and a Tripartite agreement between Pakistan, Afghanistan and the UNHCR. Over time the ‘refugee’ category has been deliberately exchanged with ‘foreigner’/‘alien’, via regressive State policies, such as the ‘Alien Registration Card’, and most recently under the ‘Illegal Foreigner’s Repatriation Plan’. Nevertheless, conversely, the domestic courts have adapted a more pragmatic approach to the rights of refugees, in line with Pakistan’s international human rights obligations and customary international law. Employing the doctrines of universality and non-discrimination, this paper cements a Global South perspective towards realising the rights of those within this social stratification of non-citizens. In response to this protection gap, the paper advances the need for a

customary interpretation of the right to nationality in accordance with emerging state practice, Pakistan's international human rights obligations, soft law, and regional jurisprudential approaches.

3. *The gaze and the gesture: Hyper-visible insiderness and the politics of recognition in Somali ethnography*
Ayan Yasin Abdi (Malmö University)

Abstract: In contentious times of ideological polarization and anti-immigrant sentiment, migration research faces pressure to sidestep debate or engage in counter-narratives that risk division. This paper foregrounds methodology as epistemic resistance, asking: how does researcher visibility, shaped by racial and cultural legibility, mirror migrants' contested positionalities in illiberal migration regimes? Drawing on seven months of decolonial autoethnographic fieldwork among diasporic Somalis in Turkey, I reconceptualize positionality as a situational practice shaped by embodiment, recognition, and communal accountability. I challenge conventional autoethnography by introducing two decolonial methodological concepts: hyper-visible insiderness, describing how presumed belonging amplifies scrutiny and compels performances of authenticity; and qowmiyyada, an emic Somali politics of conduct that regulates legitimacy and access through culturally legible practices. These findings show that insider-outsider fluidity is insufficient for capturing the politics of visibility. Instead, belonging emerges through negotiation, performance, and accountability to communal expectations. For migrants and researchers alike, visibility is a double-edged condition that enables access while subjecting one to misrecognition and surveillance. By linking these ethnographic insights to wider debates, the paper contributes to the development of decolonial autoethnography as a methodological approach attuned to visibility, vulnerability, and relational ethics. It advances Meth@Mig's commitment to pluralism and reflexivity by centering emic epistemologies as tools for studying migration in illiberal times and treating reflexivity not as introspection but as epistemic resistance.

4. *Suspicion and (non)belonging at the intersection of mental health and migration status: Insights from an ethnography in the Swiss security police*

Mira Ducommun (University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northern and Western Switzerland)

Abstract: In the context of the ongoing securitization and criminalization of migration (Huysmans 2000; Tazzioli 2021), a significant part of police work involves managing and controlling migrants (Parmar 2020). At the same time, studies have shown that an increasing proportion of police work is spent resolving situations involving persons in a state of emotional distress (Ouellet et al. 2021; Watson et al. 2014). This paper is interested in the crossroad of these two fields: It asks how the police deal with persons who are both categorized with reference to their migration status and their mental health. Based on an ethnographic study in different Swiss police organizations, the paper aims to untangle the intricate categorization processes at play in police situations involving "North African asylum seekers" and their ramifications for those addressed by the police. Looking into situations such as police detention and crime control as well as the discourses surrounding these situations, the paper sheds light on the different underlying logics. In doing so, it seeks to understand why the medical modality (Nelson 2010) is so often absent, even when persons show signs of severe mental distress. Drawing on intersectional theory (Collins 2019; Jarman 2011), the paper elucidates the often neglected and complex interplay of migration status, mental health, race, and gender, and how it informs the way the police deal with these situations.

PANEL 30 (ONLINE):

IMMIGRATION RHETORICS IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Chair: Gülşen Doğan (Koç University & MiReKoç)

Discussant: Svitlana Romaniuk (University of Warsaw)

1. *The rhetoric against the 'foreigner': Old patterns, new forms- Romania as a case study*

Iulia Elena Hossu (Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities)

Abstract: In recent years, migration has emerged as a pivotal—and profoundly polarizing—theme in public and political discourse. Populist and radical right-wing parties have employed migration as a means to advance their political agendas, frequently utilizing misleading narratives and disregarding scientific evidence. Romania, which until recently experienced a significant outflow of migrants to Western Europe in pursuit of employment following the fall of the communist regime in 1989, has, in the last five years, emerged as a major destination for migrants from countries such as Nepal, Sri Lanka, India, and Bangladesh. The majority of foreign workers in Romania are employed in the construction, commercial,

and tourism sectors. As this population grew, a discourse with strong xenophobic overtones emerged, targeting "foreigners" as the new enemies of Romanians. Politically, extremist parties gained ground, making xenophobic statements. Civil society's reaction seems weak, insufficient to counter populism and the extreme right. The present study commences with a discussion of the most recent xenophobic statement directed against foreign workers in Romania by a representative of the country's primary extremist party, AUR. The subsequent analysis of this statement and the rise of xenophobic discourse is intended to provide a basis for the discussion of reactions to this type of discourse. The following inquiries are addressed by this analysis: A rigorous examination of the factors that have contributed to the escalation of xenophobic rhetoric is imperative. What are civil society's reactions to this type of discourse? What solutions does civil society have to combat xenophobic discourse?

2. *Beyond the ballot: How anti-immigrant parties shape migration narratives in the Global South*

Ezgi Irgil (Universidad Carlos III de Madrid)

Abstract: Are there anti-immigrant political parties in the Global South? Driven by this question, this paper examines the existence of anti-immigrant political parties in the Global South and to what extent they have power over their national politics. Considering most of the migration movements are occurring within the states in the Global South, there is a dire gap in the literature that focuses on the anti-immigrant political parties. One reason for this is that there are surprisingly very few anti-immigrant political parties. However, we argue that the existing ones, despite their lack of electoral success, have power to shape political agendas contributing to a nuanced understanding of immigration-related policies through an anti-immigrant political narrative. Hence, we further argue that what these parties have in common is (1) a single-issue rhetoric, which they (a) present all immigrants as existential threat, (b) label all immigrants in a humiliating manner and scapegoating, and (c) offer "popular" policy fixes, (2) high visibility in the media, and (3) ability to influence the national rhetoric on immigration. To demonstrate our argument, we focus on Turkey (the Victory Party) and South Africa (Operation Dudula). As a result, while contributing to the anti-immigrant political party literature, we also show that despite the emphasis on socio-cultural differences in the existing Global North cases, we find that the countries in the Global South use a similar populist rhetoric, in addition to the socio-economic explanations. Thus, this research contributes to and expands populism and migration studies.

3. *Asylum in the crossfire: The politicization of protection in Germany through the case of Turkish asylum seekers*

Zekiye Gürün-Ücem (Justus-Liebig-University of Gießen)

Abstract: In the aftermath of the attempted coup in Türkiye in 2016, Germany has become a major destination for Turkish citizens seeking asylum, including civil servants, journalists, and academics targeted by state purges. Their arrival has coincided with intensifying public debates on migration in Germany, shaped by the growing influence of populist and far-right parties who portray migration as a security threat and fuel skepticism toward human rights instruments. This paper examines how the asylum claims of Turkish nationals are governed through increasingly politicized frameworks. It analyzes publicly available data, policy trends, and asylum authority practices to explore how the designation of Türkiye as a "safe country" is instrumentalized to downplay political persecution and to streamline rejection procedures. These developments reflect a broader tendency to depoliticize asylum and to sideline the democratic principles invoked in international protection regimes. Positioned within this polarized landscape, Turkish asylum seekers often articulate a vision of the "German Dream" centered on justice and democratic values. Yet their aspirations are met with legal ambiguity, long procedures, and media narratives that increasingly echo populist rhetoric. Their experiences reveal the contested space between official commitments to human rights and rising political pressures to restrict access to asylum. The paper contributes to debates on how asylum governance is shaped by ideological polarization and how migrants become entangled in broader battles over national identity, legitimacy, and resistance in contentious times.

4. *Mapping migration narratives: Evolving perspectives and public opinion during times of crisis*

Maarja Vollmer (University of Neuchâtel)

Abstract: Migration debates are shaped by a variety of actors — including migrants, policymakers, political parties, civil society, and the media — who influence one another but often diverge in how they understand migration's effects on society. In liberal contexts, such debates are frequently framed in terms of nationalism, utilitarianism, or solidarity (Freeman 1995). Yet in times of crisis, polarisation intensifies and contentious narratives around security, sovereignty, humanitarianism, and morality come to the fore,

feeding into the illiberal dynamics that characterise contemporary migration politics. This paper examines how migration-related claims have evolved during crisis periods over the last three decades, which new frames have emerged, and how these shifts relate to concurrent public opinion trends. Drawing on a unique dataset of more than 19,000 immigration-related claims in newspapers across ten European countries (AT, BE, CH, ES, HU, IE, NL, PT, SE, UK), the analysis identifies the actors making these claims — such as state institutions, political parties, NGOs, or media voices — and the frames they mobilised. Using interrupted time series analysis, these discursive shifts are systematically compared with data from large-scale opinion surveys (World Values Survey, European Social Survey, Eurobarometer) to capture changes in public preferences over the same period. The findings show how migration was framed in times of crisis, which narratives gained traction among different actors, and where consensus or divergence occurred. By juxtaposing media claims with survey framings, the paper highlights the co-production of knowledge between public opinion research and politicised debates, and its implications for polarisation in migration politics.

5. *Mediating refugee subjectivity and populist discourse in Turkey: Cinema at the border*

Fatma Serdaroğlu (Anadolu University)

Abstract: Forced migration presents a significant ethical and political challenge, particularly in Turkey, which hosts one of the world's largest displaced populations following the Syrian civil war. In the context of illiberal rhetoric and restrictive migration policies, Syrians in Turkey occupy a precarious legal status. Lacking formal refugee recognition, they remain politically marginalized and vulnerable to public hostility. Dominant media discourses often reduce them to helpless victims or threatening outsiders, reinforcing dehumanizing and racialized stereotypes. This paper examines how Turkish cinema engages with these dominant representations. Focusing on films that depict Syrian refugees, it analyzes whether they challenge or inadvertently reproduce hegemonic narratives by exploring refugee vulnerability, lived experiences, and constrained forms of agency. In a polarized political climate where anti-immigrant sentiment shapes both policy and public opinion, cinema becomes a critical medium for negotiating refugee subjectivity. Employing comparative contextual content analysis and critical film theory, the study draws on Rancière's concept of dissensus to explore how films reflect, contest, or complicate dominant public attitudes and state-centered narratives. It interrogates whether cinematic texts offer counter-narratives that foreground refugee agency or critique the structural causes of displacement. By analyzing cultural narratives circulating in the public sphere, the research investigates how migration governance is socially constructed and contested in politically charged times. It contributes to broader scholarly debates on the politicization of migration and highlights the role of cultural production in fostering more inclusive, critically engaged perspectives on displacement.

PANEL 31 (ONLINE):

THE ROLE OF CSOs AND NON-STATE ACTORS IN MIGRATION AND INCLUSION

Chair: Amy Rutherford (Queen's University Belfast)

Discussant: Claire Vincent-Mory (University of Liège)

1. *Evidence-based or debate-based policy? Insights into the utilisation of evaluation findings from a German federal programme in the scope of Shaping Diversity*

Stefanie Reiter (German Youth Institute)

Abstract: Democratic societies are exposed to tendencies of extremism, societal polarisation and accompanying changes in debates on migration and integration. One way of addressing these challenges is the complex German federal programme “Live Democracy!“, supporting engagement of civil society actors and capacity building of migrant organisations and NGOs. The scientific description and monitoring of such socio-political programmes requires applied research approaches and strategies. External evaluation plays a specific role in such contexts as it acts at the interface between science, various programme stakeholders and societal needs in general. Unlike in many other fields of evaluation and evidence-based policy, findings are unlikely to be put on the backburner or how Jacob (2024) refers to it “end up gathering dust on a shelf“. They rather become part of intense debates and are instrumentally utilised by right-wing parties to advance their own political agendas (Reiter/Heinze 2015). In particular, the programme's objective of ‘shaping diversity’ and contributing to a positive and constructive view of diversity is frequently put in the spotlight. Based on examples of responses to evaluation findings (e.g. deflections) and hostilities of right-wing actors against programme stakeholders (including evaluators),

the contribution shows adjustments in debates and coping strategies of civil society organisations, political/administrative programme commissioners and evaluators to avoid the instrumentalisation of evaluative programme results. In addition, it explores the implications for the position of evaluators as co-decisive player in addressing societal challenges and co-creators of programmes against the background of standards of quality in research methods and practice.

2. *NGOs as key actors in the social and cultural integration of migrants: Challenges and transformations in its functioning influenced by the current social and political discourse (the case of Slovakia)*

Silvia Letavajová (Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra); Monika Šrbová (Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra); Andrea Molnárová (Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra)

Abstract: NGOs play a crucial role in the integration of migrants into host societies. Their activities are particularly relevant in times of migration crises, when filling the gaps in the state system. Civil society initiatives are inseparably linked with broader socio-political processes. Since the ‘migration crisis’ of 2015, and especially after the massive exodus of Ukrainians to European countries as a result of the war in Ukraine in 2022, migration has become a highly politicised issue in Slovakia. Since the early parliamentary elections in 2023, Slovakia has witnessed controversial legislative changes that have significantly restricted the activities of NGOs and undermined their credibility. Anti-migration rhetoric and the problematisation of both migrants and NGOs have become tools for gaining political capital. The aim of this study is to describe the role of NGOs in the process of migrant integration in Slovakia and to analyse how their functioning and activities have changed as a result of negative social, political, or media discourses. We seek to examine how civic associations operate and transform within the framework of this new social climate. Methodologically, the study is based on information obtained through semi-structured interviews with representatives of NGOs, combined with contextual and content analysis of political and media presentations, online discussion forums, official NGO documentation, and legislative frameworks. Our findings contribute to advancing scholarly research on the topic, shift the public debate from the level of emotions and disinformation to that of evidence and facts, and aim to foster critical thinking.

3. *Restructuring the role of non-state actors in migration intermediation: The Malaysian experience*

Choo Chin Low (University Sains Malaysia)

Abstract: This research investigates Malaysia’s regulatory initiatives to restructure the role of non-state actors in migration intermediation. It suggests that there are three distinct types of restructuring: 1) the abolition of specific private actors (outsourcing companies) to mitigate malpractices, 2) the empowerment of specific private actors (licensed private employment agencies) to conduct recruitment activities under strict state oversight, and 3) the formalisation of specific private actors (information technology developers) to aid in the state’s digital governance of migration. This paper examines the Malaysian case study to determine 1) the state’s efforts to reform the intricate migration intermediation system and 2) the factors that influenced the state’s policy of restructuring the intermediary role. It is imperative to investigate the state’s involvement with non-state entities in light of the transformational phase of migration intermediation in Malaysia. The research distinguishes three categories of restructuring of non-state actors in the migration industry: formalising, empowering, and phasing out. The objective of these regulatory reforms is not to completely deprivatize or eliminate migration intermediation; rather, they are to enhance state control over its operations.

4. *Closed borders, travelling discourses. How the polarization of European migration policies and debates fosters competition and suspicion among Senegal’s civil society*

Marco Sassoon (University of Cologne); Ibrahima Konate (Independent researcher)

Abstract: Current European debates on migration are increasingly politicized and polarized. In the wake of rising far-right populism, discourses portraying migrants as a threat to social order have gained momentum, justifying increasingly violent border policies and technologies. These oversimplified and heated debates, often reduce the subject to cries for closed versus open borders. One lesser-known aspect is how such polarization affects the actions of civil society actors involved in migration in countries of origin. In Senegal, civil society associations play an important role in addressing migration-related issues, such as reintegrating deportees and supporting the families of missing migrants. However, due to the ambiguity of state policies and discourses, and the monopoly of foreign organizations over substantial funds, civil society actors are often compelled to compete for partnerships with European or Europe-influenced institutions.

Through ethnographic research in the region of Dakar, we examined how this resulted in the proliferation of political discourse mirroring the polarization of European debates. We analyze such discourses as materialities which shape reality, stemming from sources that hold a high position in current power structures. To secure institutional support, civil society actors may adopt views that criminalize migration and endorse border restrictions. Conversely, the suffering of migrants can be exploited for public relations stunts aimed at securing funds. An “hermeneutics of suspicion” emerges among different organizations as they accuse each other of lacking transparency. This can hinder the development of emic discourses and disadvantage the ultimate beneficiaries of such projects.

PANEL 32 (ONLINE):

MIGRANT CHILDREN, FAMILIES, AND THE POLITICS OF PROTECTION

Chair: Claire Lefort-Rieu (University of Liège)

Discussant: Moises Vieira (The University of Manchester)

1. *Not in my backyard. Unaccompanied minors, postborder transferability and (im)mobilities at the Canary Islands*

Ana López-Sala (Spanish National Research Council); Dirk Godenau (Universidad de La Laguna)

Abstract: The geography of maritime migration routes has significantly impacted the territorial effects of migrant reception in an uneven manner. This impact has been especially pronounced in the case of unaccompanied minors because Spain's decentralized political system delegates child protection responsibilities to autonomous communities. Consequently, the Canary Islands have been compelled to address the reception of these minors independently. The intensification of arrivals since 2020 has precipitated the complete collapse of existing resources, resulting in the presence of over 5,600 unaccompanied foreign minors and the infringement of children's rights. This unequal and unfair treatment has sparked an intense political debate about the distribution of unaccompanied minor refugees and regional solidarity, leading to the search for legal and operational solutions. However, regions governed by conservative and far-right parties (PP and Vox) have repeatedly hindered this process. In this contentious context, migration governance regarding the reception of unaccompanied foreign minors has become a particularly bitter arena due to their criminalization in public discourse by the far right, as well as the growing rejection and mistrust they arouse among the population. Our analysis shows how the increasing politicization of the reception of unaccompanied minor migrants influences integration policymaking processes. This study also introduces the concept of intransferability to illustrate the dynamics and logic of the immobilization of unaccompanied migrant minors within these peripheral enclaves and mainland Spain.

2. *The dual logic of U.S. and EU immigration policy for unaccompanied minors in illiberal times*

Isabella Miano (University of Catania)

Abstract: In an era marked by deepening economic disparities, climate crises, pandemics, and geopolitical conflicts, unaccompanied minors (UAMs)—children navigating migration alone—face heightened vulnerability. This study investigates how immigration policies concerning UAMs have evolved in the United States and the European Union over the past decade, particularly under increasingly illiberal political climates. Building on prior research that positions UAMs at the intersection of migration and child protection legislation, the analysis reveals a duality in policy approaches: while immigration continues to be framed as a security threat, policies targeting UAMs oscillate between protective and restrictive measures. Situated within the field of international relations and humanitarian migration, the research explores how global political frameworks influence the treatment of vulnerable migrant populations. The unit of analysis is a policy change, defined along two dimensions: “protective” i.e., a policy that facilitates access to immigration relief and expand rights, and “restrictive” i.e., a policy that hinders access and curtail protections. Using longitudinal desk analysis and content review of legislative texts, complemented by secondary literature and reports from NGOs, international organizations and think tanks, the study examines U.S. and EU policies from 2014 to June 2025 that directly or indirectly affected UAM vulnerability. Findings indicate a recent trend toward increased restrictiveness in entry and border control domain. This shift underscores the tension between humanitarian obligations and securitized

migration governance, raising critical questions about the future of child-centered migration policy in liberal democracies.

3. *Divided families, divisive policies: The contentious politics of refugee family reunification in Europe after a decade of 'migration crises'*

Lucy Hunt (University of Luxembourg)

Abstract: This paper explores the landscape of refugee family reunification policies and debates across Europe as of 2025, to take stock after a decade of successive migration 'crises' and shifting political responses. Drawing on extensive desk-based research, it examines national practices and socio-political debates shaping access to family reunification for refugees and beneficiaries of international protection across the continent. Drawing on Tilly and Tarrow's (2015) framework of contentious politics, the paper argues that processes of polarisation, boundary activation, performing repertoires of contention and political identity formation have shaped these debates and resulting policies. Case studies from Austria, Finland, the Netherlands and Portugal illustrate how family reunification has become a divisive issue, around which claims of humanitarian obligation clash with those of national interest and security. In terms of policy implementation, despite EU-level directives and legal frameworks promoting family unity, reunification procedures remain fragmented – with significant disparities in terms of eligibility, documentation requirements and timelines. Overall, policies and procedures have been found to be increasingly restrictive, triggering legal challenges and louder NGO advocacy and pushing refugees to take on a more politicised identity. The paper concludes by arguing for more harmonised, rights-based approaches, and proposes specific areas for reform. These include clearer procedures, flexible documentation rules and improved support for refugees' social, educational and economic inclusion. It contributes to broader debates on migration governance and refugee protection in contemporary Europe.

4. *Migration and elderly care in aging Asia: Factors influencing the migration pathways of Myanmar care workers in Japan under institutionalized migration channels*

Aye Theingi (Waseda University)

Abstract: The increased flow of migrant care workers from Myanmar in recent years, after the military coup in 2021, led to an inquiry into their migration processes. The political instability in Myanmar and legal reforms by the Japanese government comprise the underlying factors of the migration of Myanmar care workers. Coming from the country with diverse political and socio-economic backgrounds, the case of Myanmar care workers in Japan explores how social inequalities in the country of origin influence the migration processes of care workers. This paper analyzes the factors influencing the migration pathways of Myanmar care workers in Japan under institutionalized migration channels. It explores how intra-migrant inequalities, such as ethnicity, language, class, and migration status, influence migration pathways of care workers. It also describes the role of sending agencies and receiving agencies in the migration process of care workers from Myanmar to Japan. Using the qualitative analysis of interviews with 30 Myanmar care workers, who are currently residing in Japan, the findings reveal that care workers under different migration pathways, facing intra-migrant inequalities and hierarchical challenges, navigated successful migration pathways shaped by their socio-economic backgrounds. The results highlight the significant role of government policies and recruitment agencies in the sending country, creating opportunities for migration while reinforcing the precarity of Myanmar care workers in Japan. This paper contributes to the existing literature on migration and care work by examining empirical evidence that highlights the lived experiences of care workers under institutionalized migration channels.

5. *Rethinking age assessment for unaccompanied migrant children: Exploring the Barnahus model's potential*

Natale Serón Arizmendi (University of Deusto)

Abstract: The increase in unaccompanied migrant children at European borders has brought the issue of migration to the political agenda. Within a socio-political context marked by suspicion of the "other" and securitised approaches, border protection often takes precedence over the legal status of minority age, despite international law affirming that the latter should prevail due to the inherent vulnerability it entails. In this tension between territorial and age boundaries, age assessment emerges as a controversial issue, as it has become a widespread practice relying primarily on medical and biological tests with a significant margin of error, rather than on a comprehensive evaluation of the children's psychological condition and background. Notwithstanding the overall contentious nature of migration politics, initiatives have arisen that resist fear-driven narratives and seek to guarantee, de facto, the protection that international law

provides de jure under the doctrine of “the best interest of the child.” One such model is Barnahus. Originally developed to support child victims of sexual abuse and other forms of violence, this model is now being considered for multidisciplinary application in age assessment procedures, aiming to reduce bureaucracy, expedite processes, and prevent the re-victimisation often caused by institutional procedures. Building on the potential of the Barnahus model, this contribution explores its core elements; examines the legal implications of adapting it to the age determination of unaccompanied migrant children; considers its promising benefits for the child; and reflects on how such a proposal might fit within the current polarised and reactive migration policy environment.

PANEL 33 (ONLINE):

MIGRANT ACTIVISM AND ADAPTIVE REPERTOIRES OF RESISTANCE

Chair: Hannah Wainwright (University of Leeds)

Discussant: Shannon Gouppy (University of Liège)

1. *Diasporic civic and political engagement under authoritarian resurgence: Adaptive repertoires of Tunisians in France*

Eleanor Y.T. Chan (Kyushu University)

Abstract: This paper examines how the Tunisian diaspora in France has recalibrated its civic and political engagement strategies in response to authoritarian resurgence in homeland. Since 2019, President Kais Saied’s dismantling of intermediary institutions and civil society has led to the collapse of key political opportunity structures. Drawing on Sidney Tarrow’s (1998) Political Opportunity Structure (POS) framework, this study analyzes how the erosion of access, allies, elite division, and tolerance for dissent has shaped adaptive repertoires of emerging diasporic civic and political engagement. The study is based on semi-structured interviews with prominent Tunisian diaspora leaders and activists in France, including the former Consul-General of Tunisia in Paris who served during the immediate post-revolution period (2012–2014), and a France-based lawyer who was once a student of Kais Saied. Along with digital ethnography and documentary analysis, the study identifies two emerging adaptive repertoires: (1) symbolic civic expression (e.g., Arab cultural activism, commemorative protests supporting jailed opposition figures, Tunisian identity preservation) and (2) technocratic advocacy (e.g., diaspora-led policy forums and economic development initiatives). These practices sidestep formal politics while maintaining political meaning, enabling diasporic actors to express solidarity, dissent, and responsibility without direct confrontation. This research contributes to the conference theme by examining how illiberal turns in origin-country politics and shrinking political space reshape migrant agency abroad, encouraging them to contest, reframe, and repurpose civic and political engagement amid authoritarian drift. Conceptually, it advances a dynamic framework for understanding diasporic engagement as neither binary (engaged/disengaged or active/passive) nor static, but adaptive to structural constraints.

2. *“Won’t be silenced”: Digital feminist activism and agency of Brazilian migrants in Portugal*

Francisca Sassetti (Royal Holloway University of London & UNESCO Chair in ICT4D)

Abstract: Focusing on Brazilian women migrants in Portugal, this paper investigates how digital feminist activism enables agency in an increasingly polarised migration context. Rising xenophobia, sexism, and the sexualised stereotyping of Brazilian women are deeply rooted in Portugal’s colonial legacies, shaping how migrants are racialised and positioned in the host society. Drawing on a postcolonial lens, the research examines how digital platforms can both reflect and challenge these power asymmetries. Based on digital ethnography and semi-structured interviews with Brazilian migrants, the research discusses how digital technologies can provide solidarity, information exchange, and practical support, while also serving as arenas for decolonial feminist activism. These digital spaces enable migrants to resist marginalisation and reshape narratives that otherwise depict them as passive or deviant. The paper argues that digital feminist activism functions as a form of activism-enabled agency, amplifying migrants’ voices in a highly polarised political and media environment. By combining insights from digital migration studies with a postcolonial perspective, the research foregrounds the intersections of gender, race, and technology in shaping migrant lives. It further shows how Brazilian women in Portugal actively contest dominant migration discourses, negotiate belonging, and reassert dignity in contentious times.

3. *(In)visibility, vulnerability, and resistance: Migrant activism in the Collectif des Jeunes du Parc de Belleville*

Martine El Ouardi (Université de Lausanne)

Abstract: This paper focuses on the first self-organized group of underaged migrants in France, created in Paris in 2023. Its members, who come from West Africa, seek recognition as unaccompanied minors, a lengthy administrative procedure during which they are systematically presumed to be lying about their age and denied state protection. This reflects the French state's inability to reconcile the figure of the vulnerable child with that of the migrant, constructed in contentious public debates as a threat. Drawing on two years of ethnographic fieldwork and personal engagement with the collective, the paper shows how these young migrants contest their political and spatial invisibilization. By occupying city-owned buildings, they strategically navigate tensions between the Paris city government, which promotes itself as a "sanctuary city," and the French state, whose immigration policies are increasingly restrictive under the influence of far-right rhetoric. Their discourse points to the state's deliberate inaction as responsible for their precarity and frames political struggle as the only way to obtain rights. Organizing collectively against institutional racism fosters forms of belonging amongst members of the collective, creating a space where they speak and behave free of suspicion, forge friendships, and counter isolation. While their increased visibility has brought gains in access to education and housing, it has also exposed them to harassment from far-right groups. This paper explores the dyads of resistance/power and visible/invisible through a unique case study, showing how claiming vulnerability can be a tool for mobilization, and highlighting unintended consequences of visibility under rising anti-immigrant sentiment.

4. *Restrictive and short-sighted – how government provisions sparked a migrant-led protest in a reception centre. A case study from north-western Italy*

Giulia Bisogni (Edge Hill University)

Abstract: In this paper, I present a specific instance occurred during the fieldwork for my PhD research. The research investigates the relationships between staff and residents inside reception centres in a north-western Italian province, using the lens of care ethics (Gilligan 2003, Kittay 2002) and practices (Tronto 2010). In July 2025, a group of asylum seekers organised a roadblock protesting for different issues; the one I am focusing on here is the years long waiting for the first interview with the Territorial Commission which rules over their application for refugee status or other types of protection. Pursuing the goal of lowering immigration figures in the country the government enforced stricter internal and external control (Adamo, 2025, Fabini and Ferraris, 2025, Varvelli and Ziccardi, 2025 and Rosina and Fontana, 2024), but also increased the number of "safe countries" (ASGI, 2024) whose nationals access a faster processing of their request (Ministero dell'Interno, 2024, ASGI, 2025). The aim of such faster procedure would be to repatriate as many migrants as possible. This provision has created a backlog of "normal" applications leading to people waiting up to 7 years to be called for the first interview. The discontent led this group of asylum seekers to organise in a visible protest which attracted the media and ultimately allowed them to directly speak to authorities. An unprecedented occurrence in the area, although not in general (Johnson, 2025, Näre, 2020), it shows how the short-sightedness of politics-led policies can create surprising opportunities for resistance and collaboration.

5. *Kurdish diasporic narratives of intergroup solidarity for resistance in Belgium*

Canan Coşkan (Independent researcher); Judit Kende (Tilburg University)

Abstract: Some members of the racially marginalized groups pursue their political struggle in places other than their land of origin because of (forced) migration. Yet, in contentious times of migration policies, pursuing political struggle in diasporic contexts can be difficult and require a complex navigation in intergroup relations. What would solidarity for political struggle and resistance against racialized violence mean in the diasporic context, where (post)migrants navigate their relationships with other groups with and without migration background? By combining the social psychology of intergroup relationships with anticolonial, liberation, and critical race research practices, we examined the ways in which (post)migrant Kurds in Belgium navigate intergroup relationships by focusing on their narratives of intergroup solidarity and resistance based on their experiences of Turkish racialized colonial violence and transnational repression. We conducted a mixed methods study combining in-depth interviews with researcher participatory truth-witnessing. In-depth interviews tapped on participants' Kurdish identities, their resistance against exclusion/denial, their sociopolitical life and their ingroup power in diaspora. Reflexive thematic analysis yielded diverse intergroup solidarity dynamics involving a diasporic navigation for resistance and solidarity against Turkish violence and transnational repression. These dynamics include a two-folded sense of internationalism with the majoritized groups (i.e., revolutionary internationalism and diplomatic alliances), interpersonal outgroup relationships, and a fragile sense of interminority solidarity

with ethno-racially minoritized groups. Participatory truth-witnessing revealed strong political organization and critical consciousness in regulating these intergroup relations. We discuss these findings in relation to the past and present contexts of transnational repression, with a fine-tuning on current antimigration policies.

PANEL 34 (ON-SITE, Building L5, Floor 1, Room 1/6):

STRATIFIED MOBILITIES AND LABOR MARKET POLICIES

Chair: Yowali Kabamba (Utrecht University)

Discussant: Eleonore Kofman (Middlesex University)

1. *Decentring digital nomadism: North-South mobilities and inequalities in contentious migration times*
Hari KC (Toronto Metropolitan University)

Abstract: This paper explores digital nomadism as a growing North-South migration phenomenon, where predominantly Global North citizens relocate temporarily to the Global South, combining work and tourism through digital technologies. Traditional migration scholarship emphasizes South-North flows, while South-South mobility has only recently gained attention; digital nomadism remains largely invisible within critical migration studies. Disciplines such as business, tourism, and ICT often frame these movements economically or lifestyle-wise, overlooking their migration dimensions and the inequalities they reproduce. Drawing on ethnographic research in Mexico, Thailand, Italy, and the UAE, this paper analyzes digital nomadic mobilities through a critical lens across macro, meso, and micro scales. At the macro level, digital nomadism is situated within historical and political contexts of colonialism, neoliberal capitalism, and global inequality, highlighting how North-South mobility intersects with structural power and contentious migration debates. At the meso level, access is filtered through mobility regimes—including digital nomad visas, free-entry systems, and private agencies—shaping opportunities by nationality, wealth, and skills. At the micro level, the experiences of local host communities and marginalized actors reveal the uneven distribution of benefits and burdens, illustrating the socio-political stakes of these movements. By connecting structural dynamics, policy frameworks, and lived experiences, this paper illuminates how digital nomadism exemplifies new forms of global mobility that are increasingly politicized and contested. It concludes with reflections on moments of resistance and the potential for more just and equitable migration practices, offering insights into how scholars and civil society can navigate and intervene in these contentious times.

2. *Wanted abroad, courted at home: Contentious perspectives on migration policies for highly skilled migrants*

Hassan Bousetta (University of Liège); Hicham Jamid (University of Neuchâtel)

Abstract: In the current context of globalization of the labour market, there is an increased competition for highly skilled workers. Some authors have described this phenomenon as the “war for talent” (Michaels et al., 2001; Beechler & Woodward, 2009). In this context, many Western countries are developing migration policies to attract highly trained professionals. These policies include, among other measures, simplifying and speeding up procedures for issuing visas, residence and work permits, particularly for professions considered to be “in high tension”. In 2009 the European Union introduced the “European Blue Card”, inspired by the American Green Card, which allows highly skilled workers from so-called “third countries” with a high-salary job offers to live and work in an EU member state. Beyond facilitating employment, these policies offer additional advantages, such as accelerated recognition of degrees and the possibility for families to accompany the worker, while also benefiting from labour rights. Some policies even include relocation support services, assistance with children's schooling, and cultural and linguistic integration programs, highlighting that attracting talent is not limited to employment conditions but encompasses a range of social and institutional factors.

3. *The missing middle: Liberal paradoxes and medium-skilled migration to the Netherlands*

Julia Reinold (Erasmus University Rotterdam); Godfried Engbersen (Erasmus University Rotterdam)

Abstract: Labour migration is regarded as one way to mitigate skills shortages. While scholarly attention tends to focus on either high- or low-skilled labour migration, medium-skilled migration remains understudied despite its increasing importance. In the Netherlands, shortages in medium-skilled professions (e.g., in healthcare) are increasing. Unlike countries such as Germany, which have introduced targeted migration pathways for individuals with vocational education, the Netherlands face

government inaction. This paper investigates how opportunities for, and barriers to, medium-skilled migration are understood and negotiated in the Dutch context. Drawing on 24 stakeholder and expert interviews, we explore how the need for medium-skilled migration is perceived, what initiatives are already in place, and which political, institutional, and societal dynamics limit policy development. Our findings show that debates on medium-skilled migration are shaped less by labour market needs than by broader political dynamics. Interviewees emphasized how populist discontent about the perceived social costs of low-skilled migration and concerns over the misuse of the highly skilled migrant scheme restrict the scope for rational policymaking in support of medium-skilled migration, thereby ignoring the needs of companies and institutions. This is new for the Netherlands: The populist voice seems stronger than the capitalist voice and prevents more balanced labour migration governance. We situate these dynamics within Hampshire's (2013) framework of liberal states, which are simultaneously driven toward openness (by constitutionalism and capitalist economy) and closure (by representative democracy and national community). The Dutch case illustrates how these "liberal paradoxes" constrain policy options to address pressing labour shortages.

4. *Contested narratives as protracted boundary-making: Situating the labor market within the local production of migration*

Janek von Stebut (Technische Universität Chemnitz); Denis Zeković (Technische Universität Chemnitz)

Abstract: In the context of anti-migrant sentiments reshaping discourse and politics, reframing migration and immigration as a labour market potential is becoming an increasingly widespread counter-strategy. While employment represents an important aspect of integration, such an approach frequently follows a reductionist, economic logic, neglecting broader questions of social cohesion, belonging and exclusion. As a result, migrants are subject to boundaries drawn mainly along economic lines. To scrutinize this narrow perspective, we develop a widened conceptual lens and situate the access to the labour market within broader local narratives. Drawing on qualitative research conducted in four medium-sized German cities, we analyse how local narratives are constructed and negotiated, and how they produce orders of (non)belonging. This perspective enables us to reconstruct the interrelation between labour market integration and the narrative formation of social cohesion, inclusion and exclusion. Moreover, we show how narrative boundaries drawn along lines of origin, religion or perceived economic usefulness reproduce or challenge social boundaries that go beyond access to the labour market. For this, we draw on approaches to boundary-making (e.g. Barth 1969; Lamont & Molnár 2002; Wimmer 2008), studies on narratives (Boswell et al. 2021; Dennison 2021) and incorporate the concept of migrantisation (Anderson 2013). On this basis, we develop a comprehensive perspective on the narrative formation and negotiation of symbolic and social boundaries. Consequently, we argue that migration in small and medium-sized cities is (re)produced locally as a contested identity-forming narrative, through which access to the labour market is framed and regulated.

PANEL 35 (ON-SITE, Building L5, Floor 1, Room 1/1):

STATE CONTROL, MIGRATION GOVERNANCE, AND BORDER MANAGEMENT

Chair: Eylul Ozmen (Leuphana University of Lüneburg)

Discussant: Giacomo Solano (RUNOMI, Radboud University)

1. *Aggressive integrationism in contentious times: Shared values as an integration requirement in liberal democracy*

Stefan Manser-Egli (University of Amsterdam)

Abstract: Can liberal democracies require shared values? In the course of the contentious politicization of migration in recent years, the integration requirement to share constitutional values has become increasingly popular in many Western migration and integration regimes. Even in the process of what was considered a liberalization of the German naturalization law in 2023, the then Interior Minister Nancy Faeser (Social Democratic Party) asserted that "anyone who does not share our values cannot become German." This article analyses the normative implications of the value requirement in light of what has been discussed as the conundrum of illiberal liberalism. The paper examines the recent integration requirement to respect constitutional values in Switzerland. First, it scrutinizes illiberal bureaucratic practices of culturalization and state access to inner convictions in street-level implementation of the requirement. Second, it discusses whether the adoption of constitutional values can be required of non-citizens only. Finally, it examines whether shared values can be legitimately

required from society as a whole. The paper argues that the shared values requirement is incompatible with the pluralism of values in liberal democracy. Through the exclusion in the name of shared values, aggressive integrationism forecloses politics as an agonistic contestation of these values. In conclusion, I will discuss whether one reason this fundamental paradox has hardly been recognized and debated as such in public and political discourse (including liberal and progressive political actors) might be the contentious times that migration and integration governance are going through in many parts of the world.

2. *Internal bordering and migrant (im)mobility governance in Northern Morocco*

Myriam Cherti (Oxford University & University Mohammed VI Polytechnic); Leen De Nutte (University Mohammed VI Polytechnic); Safae Wahid (University Mohammed VI Polytechnic); Douaa Saffar (University Mohammed VI Polytechnic)

Abstract: This paper examines how internal dispersal practices have become central to the governance of irregular migration in Morocco's northern border cities, designed to deter crossings to Europe. Drawing on interviews with Moroccan and other migrants in towns adjacent to the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, the study explores how dispersal constitutes a new form of internal bordering that reflects the externalisation of European border control and its reinterpretation through local enforcement. Building on theories of everyday bordering (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss & Cassidy, 2019) and border as method (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013), dispersal is understood not merely as a logistical measure but as a practice extending border enforcement into Morocco's interior. Findings show dispersal disrupts mobility and undermines migrants' social and economic ties, producing isolation and immobility. These effects are compounded by ID checks on public transport and targeted surveillance, obstructing return to northern border areas. The paper also highlights migrants' agency under constraint (de Certeau, 1984; De Genova, 2017). While some recalibrate aspirations toward settlement in Morocco, conditional on access to labour markets, others persist in returning to border zones through adaptive routes and strategies. These responses illustrate how dispersal constrains but does not extinguish agency. The paper concludes that dispersal underscores the gap between Morocco's national discourse of "humanised" border management and local enforcement practices, where dispersal operates as a strategy of deterrence and control. Situating these dynamics within critical border studies, it contributes to debates on how borders are reproduced through governance and migrant responses within national territories.

3. *Extending the border south: U.S. migration externalization in South America under Trump*

Ximena Canal Laiton (Universidad Carlos III de Madrid)

Abstract: The second Trump administration is extending U.S. migration externalization policies into South America, a shift from their earlier concentration in Mexico and Central America under previous administrations. In 2025, Executive Order 14165 and a series of opaque meetings in Colombia, Ecuador, Argentina, Chile, and Paraguay mark this turn, advancing negotiations on "safe third country" arrangements, deportation mechanisms, and the exchange of migrants' personal data. This expansion unfolds within a South American context marked by increasingly restrictive migration policies, the politicization of anti-migration discourse in Peru, Ecuador, Chile and Argentina, and recent elections in Ecuador, as well as upcoming elections in Bolivia, Chile, and Colombia. Such a climate creates favorable conditions for the administration's externalization agenda. Right-wing and far-right governments instrumentalize migration to mobilize discourses of fear and security, while left-leaning governments show limited progress in promoting integration and protection. Understanding how these dynamics interact is essential to assessing the scope and limits of U.S. strategies in the region. Empirically, the paper draws on policy documents, official communications, media reports, and secondary sources, using comparative policy and discourse analysis to trace the evolution of externalization practices and their intersections with domestic agendas. By situating these strategies within the current contentious climate, the paper contributes to debates on the use of U.S. power to punish racialized migrant populations, on how unequal relations between countries affect migrants, and on the strategic use of migration as a tool of political legitimization in illiberal times.

4. *Illiberal migration governance during wartime: Russian policies towards (im)mobility of Ukrainian citizens*

Lidia Kuzemska (Forum Transregionale Studien)

Abstract: The paper examines the Russian state's policies towards Ukrainian citizens trying to enter/exit the occupied territories of Ukraine after 2022. Following the illiberal paradox of migration policies logic

analysed by Natter (2023), I look at why the Russian autocratic regime enacted migration policies that might not have been popular among its citizens, but were deemed necessary by the regime. As Ukrainian citizens are considered sufficiently culturally, ethnically and linguistically “close” to Russians and “easy to integrate”, not only migration, but also citizenship policy towards them was purposefully open. In short, the policies combined the introduction of strict controls over the entry and exit of Ukrainian citizens from/to the occupied territories (and to the Russian Federation from abroad), forced mass-scale passportisation of the local Ukrainian population and deportation of those considered a “security threat” from the territory of the Russian Federation. The paper also analyses these policies vis-à-vis changes in a wider regional migration governance context by looking at how the EU-Russian, Ukrainian-Russian and Russia-Georgian migration and border regime changes after 2022 impacted the (im)mobility of Ukrainian citizens from/to the Russian territory. The multiplying effect of all these wartime restrictions has been severely impacting mobility opportunities for Ukrainian citizens travelling from/to the occupied territories of Ukraine.

PANEL 36 (ON-SITE, Building L5, Ground floor, Room 0/3):

RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY AND BELONGING IN POLARIZED TIMES

Chair: Félicien de Heusch (University of Copenhagen)

Discussant: Billie Martiniello (European University Institute)

1. *Attitudes towards Muslims among youth in Sweden: Analyzing survey data for 2003, 2009, 2014 and 2025*

Pieter Bevelander (Malmö Institute for Studies of Migration); Jonas Otterbeck (Aga Khan University International in the UK)

Abstract: This study employs multiple regression analysis to investigate young people's attitudes towards Muslims in Sweden, focusing on the influence of various background factors and potential changes over time. Based on unique material that contains representative samples of non-Muslim youths aged 15–19 from the years 2003, 2009, 2014, and 2025, the findings highlight the significance of gender, socio-economic and educational factors in shaping these attitudes. Socio-psychological and local structural variables also play a role, albeit to a lesser extent. Overall, the results indicate a decline in negative attitudes over time, a trend that stands in contrast to prevailing political narratives surrounding immigration and Muslims in Europe and Sweden.

2. *Religions and migration as a tool for polarization and the role of local public powers in the management of religious diversity*

Gorka Urrutia Asua (University of Deusto)

Abstract: Pluralism is a core element for liberal democracies. With the democratic establishment of 1978 Spain adapted its normative framework to the European context, including rights and freedoms that characterize democracies such as the ones of the other EU countries. During these decades social changes have happened, among others a change in the religious composition of the society. At the same time, and since the beginning of the current century, Spain has become a country of immigration with percentages of people of foreign origin similar to the surrounding countries. Policies and governance of migration and diversity have been deployed in the last decades as a response to this “new” realities. In the current context of polarization these issues are being included in the debates in relation to migration, integration and the management of diversity. Initiatives contemplating science-based data, the participation of various actors and promotion of fundamental rights are being developed by public powers and, at the same time, debates and initiatives against this social reality are emerging in political discourse and public opinion. This contribution pretends to analyze the current situation in Spain in relation to the public management of religious diversity and the contestation of the public presence of otherness (specifically Islam) at the local level. This analysis will include preliminary results of the research project financed by the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities (project number PID2023-149877NB-100) “Religious diversity and democratic coexistence: analysis and proposals for municipal policies (DIVERPOMU)”.

3. *Imagining elsewhere: Race, religion, and the limits of belonging among Fulani youth in Brussels*
Mariam Diallo (Université Catholique de Louvain)

Abstract: This paper reports on a study exploring the lives of young Guinean Fulani (Peul) adults belonging to the 1.5 and second generations. The study aims to understand how their experiences of belonging and identity are shaped in a context marked by racialization, Islamophobia, and exclusion. It draws on qualitative interviews (N=40) conducted between March and July 2025 with young adults aged 20 to 29 living in Brussels. Using Levitt and Schiller's (2004) framework of "ways of being" and "ways of belonging," the paper analyzes how these young adults enact and negotiate identity in everyday life, beyond static understandings of ethnicity and nationhood. Although formally recognized as Belgian citizens, many still express limited attachments to Belgium, citing persistent racialization and the inescapability of their Blackness as barriers to full belonging. As a result, they imagine alternative futures elsewhere. These aspirations go beyond their country of origin (e.g., Guinea) and often include neighboring West African countries like Senegal or Côte d'Ivoire—perceived as offering better economic opportunities, cultural familiarity, and free religious practice. Some also consider non-African Muslim-majority countries. These transnational imaginaries reflect layered responses to structural inequality and exclusion. Identification with Fulani ethnicity offers a sense of continuity, but is mobilized in diverse ways depending on religious, generational, and socio-economic positioning. The study emphasizes how transnational imaginaries emerge not in the absence of citizenship, but in response to its insufficiency. Hence, rather than challenging citizenship as a legal construct per se, it interrogates its limits as a lived experience in racialized societies.

4. *Cultivating agency, belonging, and continuity: Women's practices in the mosque*

Can Yasemin Okay (University of Osnabrück)

Abstract: Current debates on migration often emphasize the precariousness of migrant(ized) identity in light of anti-Muslim and anti-migrant racism, framing migrant(ized) individuals primarily as reactive subjects; resisting or navigating hostility. While such contentious contexts undoubtedly shape everyday life, this perspective risks reducing agency and belonging to reactionary terms alone. Drawing on six months of ethnographic fieldwork in a large urban DITIB mosque community in Germany, this paper examines how women cultivate belonging and exercise agency in ways not primarily defined by reaction, but by practices of continuity and moral community within everyday religious and social life of the mosque. Following Saba Mahmood, agency is understood as the capacity to enact norms that are meaningful within specific moral or religious traditions. The mosque emerges beyond a religious site, as a protective, and affective space of belonging; where prayer, teaching, socialization, emotional care and practical support are intertwined, generating networks of trust, reciprocity, and care. These everyday practices anchor belonging both in interpersonal ties and physical and symbolic space of the mosque; producing a sense of 'home'. Anti-Muslim and anti-migrant racism enters this space refracted, shaping but not defining communal life. By foregrounding these dynamics, the paper demonstrates that in contentious times, agency and belonging must be understood not only as reactive, but also as practices of stability, continuity, and moral community.

PANEL 37 (ON-SITE, Building L5, Floor 1, Room 1/5):

FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE: GOVERNANCE, KNOWLEDGE, AND AGENCY IN MIGRATION CONTEXTS

Chair: Eduardo Campbell-Bethancourt (Utrecht University)

Discussant: Elsa Mescoli (University of Liège)

1. *Balkan migration crises and beyond: Agency and policies*

Anna Krasteva (CERMES/New Bulgarian University)

Abstract: This paper has a threefold aim. First, to create a typology of Balkan migration crises. Second, to reflect on how migration is theorized in a crisis situation by analysing the competing conceptual clusters and proposing new ones. Third, to measure the ratio between the region's crisis and anti-crisis potential in the field of migration in regard both to agency and policies. The paper is structured in four parts. The first part reconstructs the conceptual history of "crisis" and its affirmation as the hegemonic discourse of contemporary times. It defines the innovative concept of post-democratic migration crisis. The second part introduces temporality as a theoretical zoom that illuminates a different migration profile depending on whether we are observing it in a short-term, mid-term, or long-term perspective. The third part presents a new typology of Balkan migration crises. It formulates the provocative thesis "If the crises did not exist, they would have been created by post-democratic leaders".

The fourth part goes beyond the crisis and analyses the migration and development nexus as a major policy innovation. The conclusion offers a comparative analysis of the diverse Balkan migration crises.

2. *Ireland in context: Racialised governance and the rise of the far right*

Kheira Arrouche (University College Cork)

Abstract: Ireland has often been framed as an exception within Europe due to the absence of an organised far-right tradition. Yet recent developments challenge this perception. Since 2022, far-right groups have gained visibility through protests against asylum seeker accommodation, but their rhetoric is not wholly new. Rather, it draws on exclusionary logics long embedded in Irish governance. This paper argues that Ireland's supposed exceptionalism is less a counter-case to European trends than a delayed articulation of them. The analysis employs a critical reading of political debates, media reporting, and policy documents from two key moments: the 2004 Citizenship Referendum and the anti-immigration mobilisations of 2022–2025. The 2004 Referendum, which stripped birthright citizenship from children of non-nationals, is examined as a foundational moment that normalised discourses of belonging tied to ancestry and blood. These logics, entrenched through subsequent neoliberal and nationalist policies, created the political conditions for today's mobilisations against migrants and asylum seekers. While far-right actors currently capitalise on the housing crisis and economic precarity, their narratives resonate precisely because the state has historically legitimised immigration as a threat. Ireland's migration governance, shaped in part by restrictive EU reforms, further reinforces categorical divisions of 'us' and 'them' that the far-right exploits. The paper concludes that far from insulating the country, the mainstreaming of racialised governance has rendered exclusionary discourses readily available for reactivation in moments of social strain. Ireland, therefore, sits firmly within a broader European trajectory, where far-right mobilisation emerges from fractures within the political centre.

3. *From policy to practice: Perspectives of policymaking and implementation of the Intercultural City Program of Barcelona with a focus on conviviality in public spaces*

Iren Eylül Karaoglu (Freelance researcher)

Abstract: Migration is increasingly framed as a major challenge across many European countries, often accompanied by a rise in xenophobia, racism, and anti-immigrant rhetoric. In response, scholars and policymakers have been exploring more progressive frameworks for diversity management, notably interculturalism. Unlike other integration models—such as differentialism, assimilationism, and multiculturalism—interculturalism emphasizes interethnic interaction, equal opportunities, mutual understanding, and a shared sense of belonging within today's super-diverse societies. Since 2008, the Council of Europe has promoted this approach through its Intercultural Cities Programme (ICC), which encourages local governments to design public spaces that foster inclusion, intercultural contact, and peaceful coexistence. This article contributes to the academic discourse by examining the implementation of the ICC Programme in Barcelona. Given that policies are usually designed to address 'problems', it is important to investigate what the problems are presented to be (Bacchi 2009). Accordingly, through a qualitative case study employing interviews, participant observation, and content analysis, it investigates the case of Barcelona Interculturality Program, illuminates how the policy programme is implemented in practice and what the inherent problem representations of policy implementers about the notions of conviviality and public spaces are. The study reveals the differences between the perspectives of the policymakers and policy implementers about the conceptualisations and artefacts (Wedel et al 2005) and illuminates the gap between the ambitious statements on paper at the policy conceptualisation stage and the daily reality when it comes to practice.

4. *Contradictory paths: National–local divergence in Mexico's migration policy*

Jorge Ochoa Uriostegui (University of Amsterdam)

Abstract: Migration governance in Mexico reveals a paradox along one of the world's main migration routes. At the federal level, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (2018–2024) adopted humanitarian rhetoric, but—under pressure from the Trump administration—the federal government militarized migration policy by deploying the National Guard and aligning with U.S. deterrence strategies to cut northbound flows. Detentions and deportations rose, along with severe human rights abuses against migrants that were condemned internationally. In contrast, Mexico City—one of the world's largest metropolitan areas—followed a different trajectory. Self-proclaimed a City of Hospitality, it coupled its progressive migration discourse with measures such as temporary residency cards, shelter initiatives, and expanded access to services. This paper analyses national–local divergence in Mexico's migration

governance (2017–2024) through analysis of policy documents, official statements, NGO reports, media coverage, and interviews. By tracing the gap between rhetoric and practice across levels of government, it contributes to migration governance scholarship, particularly the “local turn,” migration control gap debates, and sanctuary city research that has largely neglected Global South cases. Mexico’s current role as a country of emigration, transit, destination, and forced immobility increases the case’s complexity and relevance. It shows how progressive narratives can be mobilised federally amid restrictive practice, while local governments consolidate progressive agendas that sometimes decouple from the federal government. This article will be the first output of my doctoral research, with subsequent work focusing on how street-level actors shape the design of these local policies.

5. *Ignored knowledges: Epistemic injustice in European governance of unaccompanied minors*

Juan Eduardo Ortiz López (Universidad Pontificia Comillas)

Abstract: In a context of rising ideological polarization, the governance of unaccompanied migrant minors (UAMs) in Europe illustrates how scientific evidence is selectively mobilized, sidelined, or ignored. This paper examines the epistemic architectures that underpin child migration policies in Spain, Italy, and Belgium, drawing on a comparative qualitative analysis of legal frameworks, institutional strategies, and NGO reports. Findings reveal a persistent privileging of administrative and securitarian logics over insights from psychology, trauma-informed care, social pedagogy, and critical childhood studies. Such selective ignorance not only marginalizes relevant expertise but also produces epistemic injustices against migrant children and adolescents, who are denied recognition as knowledgeable actors in matters affecting their lives. By situating these dynamics within broader debates on evidence-based policy and epistemic governance, the paper argues that current practices undermine both the legitimacy and effectiveness of migration governance. Conceptually, it contributes by linking theorisations of selective ignorance and epistemic injustice to the specific field of child migration. Methodologically, it advances a comparative and interdisciplinary lens, highlighting the uneven incorporation of child-centered evidence across European contexts. The paper concludes by presenting the participatory and transdisciplinary framework of the PATH2EU project, which seeks to reconfigure migration governance around epistemic justice. By engaging UAMs, frontline professionals, and researchers in co-producing knowledge through Living Labs, PATH2EU demonstrates how participatory methodologies can challenge exclusionary epistemic hierarchies and foster more legitimate, inclusive, and responsive policies for migrant childhoods in Europe.

PANEL 38 (ONLINE):

MEDIA, MIGRATION, AND THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION

Chair: Maarja Vollmer (University of Neuchâtel)

Discussant: Verena Wisthaler (EURAC)

1. *Croatia’s migration transition: An analysis of current media content*

Caroline Hornstein Tomić (Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar); Vanja Dergić (Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar); Marko Mustapić (Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar)

Abstract: To address labor shortages and drive economic growth, Croatia – a traditional emigrant-sending country – liberalized its labor market in 2021. Since 2022, the country has been experiencing positive net migration, with an increasing number of migrant workers arriving from third countries such as India, Nepal, Bangladesh and the Philippines. Governing these new migration flows, integrating non-European migrants, and involving stakeholders across sectors and citizens are key political and social challenges for Croatia. On the backdrop of demographic change with a progressively shrinking and ageing population, the speed of Croatia’s „migration transition“ from an emigration to an immigration country and the scale of immigration is a major governance challenge also because it is highly contested in society and across the political spectrum. Based on media content analysis - news articles published in four online editions of leading print media/ daily newspapers over half a year in 2025, and across the political spectrum – we explore, how public opinion is currently shaping around these transformative processes with disruptive potential on social cohesion. The analysis shows that with few exceptions reporting for the time being takes a balanced approach, reverberating the complexities of cross-sector governance required for mitigating these new migration flows and their impact on Croatian society. It further outlines which topics could trigger increasing controversy and thus contribute to a shift of perspective in public opinion. The research is part of a 3-years Horizon Europe-project We-ID: Identities

– Migration – Democracy, which explores the impact of migration and demographic change on local identities and democracy.

2. *Media as bridge or barrier? The role of news consumption on immigrants' sense of belonging*

Camila Melícia Valgas (Utrecht University of Applied Sciences)

Abstract: This study examines the dual role of news consumption on immigrants' sense of belonging and how demographic factors affect this relationship. News media can act as both a bridge—offering insights into societal norms and encouraging civic participation—and a barrier, reinforcing exclusionary narratives that fuel alienation. To better understand this dual role, a multilingual survey was used to measure news consumption (frequency of news use, news sources, news trust, motivation for following the news), sense of belonging, and demographic variables of 500 immigrants in the Netherlands. Using a targeted recruitment strategy, we reached refugees, knowledge migrants, labor migrants, and family migrants through community organizations, social media platforms, and migrant networks. The survey was available in eight languages, ensuring accessibility. This study advances media and migration scholarship by illuminating how news consumption shapes belonging; accounting for intra-group differences among the immigrant population; and discussing implications for media organizations and policymakers seeking to foster a more inclusive information environment.

3. *Contrasting frames: Hungarian media representations of Syrian and Ukrainian refugee movements*

Edina Lilla Meszaros (University of Oradea)

Abstract: In contrast to the highly divided posture following the 2015 refugee crisis, an unprecedented level of solidarity toward the Ukrainian displaced persons was observed within the EU Member States in the aftermath of the Russian invasion. Hungary exemplifies a paradoxical situation, as it has long maintained a strong anti-immigrant rhetoric and implemented exclusionary policies against immigrants and asylum seekers from African and Middle Eastern countries, yet has opened its borders to Ukrainians fleeing conflict. This shift in the attitude of the Hungarian government prompted a change in the predominant migration narrative that has characterised the country for years. This article aims to elucidate the Hungarian government's response to the crisis and Ukrainian forced migrants, as well as its construction of the phenomena through speech acts and various non-verbal, visual frameworks. The study will systematically analyse how the Hungarian government has framed the displacement of Ukrainian citizens from the onset of the war to the present. Substantial frame variations may be identified in the discourses and the news coverage of the Ukrainian refugee crisis in comparison with that of the Syrian. The hegemonic power discourse dominated for years by the securitization frame was replaced with the solidarity-, humanitarian- and peace narrative. The research employs qualitative discourse and content analysis and is guided by the framing theory.

4. *Framing a 'crisis' and its political impact – The media's impact on EU migration policy*

Naja Camisa (University of Luxembourg)

Abstract: This article explores the complex dynamics surrounding the reform of the Common European Asylum System, particularly regarding the impact of the media's framing of migration on the Dublin recast processes between 2013 and 2017. This period was characterized by a perceived migratory crisis and high media salience, prompting questions regarding the influence of the media within the political sphere. Drawing on a mixed-methods approach, including a comprehensive framing analysis of five Eurocentric media outlets, twitter and European Parliamentary debates, this analysis applies findings relating to frame changes, within a comparative analysis, to measure the impact of the media framing over time, thus allowing for insights into an evolving policy-landscape. Following a securitization frame consonance in the media in late 2015, the findings reveal that especially the center-wing MEPs were susceptible to media influence, although an increasing use of securitization frames were measurable across the political spectrum by medio 2016. Through this exploration, the paper also finds that this securitization was reflected to some degree within the final policy documents, reinforcing the broader shift towards a security-driven approach within EU asylum policies and practices. By tracing the discursive links between media, politics, and policy, this paper highlights the need for a balanced and evidence-based narrative when discussing migration, both within the media and political arenas. As migration remains a central issue in European politics, understanding how framing affects governance is crucial—particularly in moments of uncertainty or perceived crisis, when narratives can shape, not only debates, but also decision-making processes.

5. *Between two shores: Media and governance discourses of the Italy–Albania migration agreement*
Bresena Kopliku (University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi")

Abstract: This paper analyzes the Italy–Albania migration agreement of November 2023 as a critical site for studying externalization, discourse, and migration governance in Europe. Drawing on critical discourse analysis of Albanian and Italian media, complemented by policy texts and official statements, it explores how the establishment of migrant processing centers in Shëngjin and Gjadër has been represented, legitimized, and contested. The analysis identifies three central dynamics. First, media narratives construct migrant identities in shifting ways: as vulnerable refugees, illegal intruders, or transient agents moving through Albania. Second, tensions emerge between national policy ambitions and the practical capacities of local governance, where municipalities are tasked with implementing arrangements negotiated at the international level. Third, polarized debates in both Italy and Albania reveal how migration management becomes entangled with competing frames of security, solidarity, and European integration, while raising persistent legal and ethical concerns. The study contributes to ongoing debates on border externalization by examining a unique case where asylum responsibilities are shifted not to distant third countries, but to a European Union candidate state. This blurs conventional boundaries between “inside” and “outside” Europe, highlighting Albania as a microcosm of the dilemmas and contradictions of contemporary migration governance. Conceptually, the paper advances the study of discourse as a form of governance practice, while methodologically it demonstrates the value of combining media analysis with policy discourse analysis to capture how migration policies are socially constructed.

PANEL 39 (ONLINE):

MIGRATION REGIMES AND THE POLITICS OF REGULARIZATION

Chair: Sifka Etlar Frederiksen (Leuphana University Lüneburg)

Discussant: Natale Serón Arizmendi (University of Deusto)

1. *Politicising migration governance: Portugal’s restrictive turn in migration regularisation*

Catarina Sampaio (Universidade Aberta)

Abstract: This investigation examines the recent decision of the Portuguese government to abolish the Expression of Interest (EOI) procedure (*manifestação de interesse*), a regularisation mechanism that had enabled migrants in irregular situations to obtain residence permits if they demonstrated employment and social security contributions. Drawing on Hein de Haas’s theory of the paradoxical effects of restrictive migration policies, the study critically assesses whether this policy shift, embedded in the 2024 Migration Action Plan, is likely to reduce irregular migration or, rather, exacerbate migrants’ precarity and social exclusion. The analysis situates the Portuguese case within broader European dynamics of politicised migration governance, showing how discourses of “crisis” and “loss of control” are mobilised by both mainstream and populist actors to justify restrictive measures. It also explores how civil society organisations, trade associations, and immigrant groups contest these policies, thereby highlighting the contentious interplay between state decisions and societal responses. Empirically, the paper draws on document analysis, secondary data, and media sources, illustrating how the abolition of the EOI may lead to increased irregularity, dependence on informal networks, labour exploitation, and long-term settlement — thereby contradicting official policy goals. The Portuguese case underscores how policies shaped by political contention ignore evidence-based knowledge, reproduce myths of invasion, and generate unintended consequences that deeply affect migrants’ lived experiences. By examining this restrictive turn, the paper contributes to debates on how contentious times and rising polarisation influence migration governance in Europe, while also demonstrating the resilience and agency of civil society actors in resisting illiberal trends.

2. *Performing deservingness to be ‘legal’: Migrant appropriations of domestic work in Italy’s immigration regime*

Fabio De Blasis (University of Milan)

Abstract: The Italian migration regime has long been marked by an inherent contradiction: the simultaneous political emphasis on combating irregular migration and the economic reliance on a steady supply of low-paid labour. This contradiction has historically been managed through recurring mass regularization campaigns and the implementation of annual labour migration quotas, with the domestic work sector frequently serving as a selective gateway to legal status. Focusing on the 2020 mass

regularization and the 2023–2025 quota programmes, and drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, this paper explores how migrants navigate the Italian legal status regime through strategic performances of “deservingness.” Many migrants appropriate the institutional category of domestic worker as a means to access ‘legality’ and residence permits. While some succeed in obtaining legal status through this route, others become trapped in the process, encountering deception, fraud, and prolonged (il)legal status immobility. The study highlights the malleability of state-imposed categories and the uneven, often arbitrary outcomes of legal status trajectories and legalization processes in Italy. It contributes to debates on the performativity of legal status and migrant agency under increasingly selective and restrictive migration policies.

3. *A human right to lawful stay? Exploring states’ regularisation obligations under international human rights law*

Diego Ginés Martín (Universidad Pontificia Comillas)

Abstract: Human rights are meant to be universally applicable to everyone within a state’s jurisdiction, but access to them remains deeply stratified depending on one’s nationality and immigration status – with irregular migrants falling at the very bottom of the spectrum. In a context of restrictive migration governance, irregular migration is often viewed as a phenomenon to be dealt with exclusively through deportation. And yet, regularisation is not only a more humane option, but in practice remains a common (if often overlooked) policy tool for states to meet various objectives. In some cases, though, residence permits might not be a policy choice of states, but rather a necessary condition for them to comply with their human rights obligations. Through a comparative analysis of case law from UN Treaty Bodies and the European, Inter-American, and African human rights systems, this paper explores (and advocates for) the recognition of a right to lawful residence under International Human Rights Law (IHRL). The paper makes both a doctrinal and normative contribution. First, it maps emerging jurisprudence recognising states’ positive duties to grant lawful residence as a necessary precondition for migrants to meaningfully access other fundamental rights – such as the right to respect for private and family life, the prohibition of torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, or the best interests of the child. Second, it offers normative interpretations of human rights provisions in support of a wider right to regularisation, grounded in and expanding current jurisprudential developments.

PANEL 40 (ONLINE):

CONTESTED SOVEREIGNTIES AND THE POLITICS OF MIGRATION GOVERNANCE

Chair: Signe Carlsen (Aarhus University)

Discussant: Tihomir Sabchev (Tilburg University)

1. *Governance and experiences of migration in a hybrid-sovereign migration state*

Karina Goulordava (Koç University)

Abstract: This paper introduces the concept of a hybrid-sovereign migration state: a country that receives significant and diverse migration flows but lacks full sovereignty over its territories and governance. Using Lebanon as an initial case study, this framework theorizes from the South, challenging assumptions of state sovereignty in migration governance and highlighting the crucial role of non-state actors. The paper also examines the complex realities of migrants’ lived experiences—both migrant workers and refugees—in a context where repressive migration policies exist within a weak state apparatus that lacks the resources and political organization needed for policy enforcement. As a result, migrants live conflicting realities; while permanent temporariness, socio-spatial marginalization, and immobility are the norm, they exist alongside spaces of opportunity, community building, and migrant agency. As migration to Lebanon has almost always taken place in contentious times—whether civil war, economic crises, or foreign intervention—this paper adopts a historical approach, analyzing migration policies and migrants’ experiences since Lebanon’s independence in 1943. The research draws on archives, newspapers, policy analysis, and interviews with migrants and key informants to triangulate data and address the challenges of conducting historical research in complex contexts. This historical trajectory is then used to reflect on Lebanon’s current migration situation—especially given that it hosts the highest number of refugees per capita globally. Engaging with research on migration in the Global South, this paper opens a space for comparative insights and a deeper understanding of migration governance and migrant agency in states where sovereignty itself is contested.

2. *From guarantees to limitations: Contradictions in Brazil's migration governance*

Cintia Sousa de Freitas (State University of Rio Grande do Norte)

Abstract: Brazil has long been recognized for its robust legal framework on migration and refugee protection, anchored in the Federal Constitution of 1988, the Refugee Law nº 9.474/1997, and the Migration Law nº 13.445/2017, all grounded in a strong human rights orientation. These norms positioned Brazil as a regional leader in upholding international commitments and constitutional guarantees. Yet recent developments reveal tensions between this rights-based tradition and restrictive practices in migration governance. In August 2024, the Ministry of Justice issued Technical Note nº 18/2024, which restricted the admission of migrants arriving irregularly at São Paulo's international airport, many intending to apply for refugee status. The measure described such claims as an alleged misuse of the asylum system and portrayed Brazil as improperly used as a transit country. While intended to deter irregular entry and unfounded asylum applications, the note has faced strong criticism from universities, civil society organizations, and the Federal Public Defender's Office, which argue that it undermines constitutional guarantees and violates the principle of non-refoulement. This case directly relates to the overall conference theme by showing how contentious times and the politicization of migration debates reshape governance in Brazil. Conceptually, the paper examines the contradiction between a rights-based legal framework and restrictive administrative measures. Methodologically, it draws on documentary analysis of official publications, legal norms, and public statements by state and non-state actors. It argues that the coexistence of progressive legislation with restrictive practices illustrates the contradictions and pressures shaping migration governance in polarized and contentious contexts.

3. *Ending the odyssey: The production of irregularity in Panama's Darién response*

Amy Rutherford (Queen's University Belfast)

Abstract: The Darién Gap, a dense jungle between Colombia and Panama, has become a focal point of regional debate. More than 73,000 individuals crossed this transit route (known as the world's most dangerous) in the first few months of 2024 alone. This is up from 4,700 in the same period in 2020, highlighting the sharp increase in mobility despite tighter border controls. Politicisation in Panama is fuelled by the United States' role as a primary destination country, influencing regional responses that put security and deterrence ahead of rights protection. In this context, in 2024, Panama's president pledged to "end the odyssey" of migration across the Darién. Panama's "flujo controlado" (controlled flow) model exemplifies this tension. Upon leaving the Darién Gap, migrants are taken to reception centres for registration and temporary stay before being bused north towards Costa Rica. Officially, migrants can leave the flow to seek protection if they want to apply for asylum. In reality, the model's design discourages claims by quickly moving people forward. This is reinforced by the widespread belief that registration is only a transit step, raising questions about constructive refoulement. Without thorough individual screening, mass transfers north risk breaching procedural protections, especially when vulnerable people (such as trafficking victims) are disregarded. This paper argues the controlled flow model constitutes administrative violence that increases irregularity rather than addressing it. Human Rights Law provides a critical counter-narrative to the growing securitisation across the Americas by framing irregularity as the result of migration governance rather than migrant choices.

4. *Politicizing mobility: Governance, agency, and the Bangladeshi migration corridor to Malaysia* Sumaia Afroze (University of Dhaka)

Abstract: Migration has become increasingly politicized in today's contentious times, where restrictive narratives and polarized debates shape both policy frameworks and migrant experiences. Within this context, Bangladeshi migration to Malaysia provides a compelling case to explore how governance and lived realities intersect amid growing securitization and public skepticism. Since the 1980s, Malaysia has drawn Bangladeshi migrants across multiple categories from low-wage migrants and students to highly skilled professionals whose journeys reflect complex intersections of geopolitical, economic, social, and cultural dynamics. This study employs a qualitative research approach, combining interviews with Bangladeshi migrants and migration experts with secondary data, to examine how migrants navigate agency, belonging, and aspirations under increasingly constrained policy environments and disputed public discourses. By comparing the experiences of different migrant categories, the research uncovers divergent strategies of adaptation, resistance, and mobility that highlight both resilience and

vulnerability in these polarized contexts. Findings indicate that the politicization of migration governance has not only reshaped migration patterns but also deepened precarities for Bangladeshi migrants, particularly in low-wage sectors. By situating the Bangladesh–Malaysia corridor within the lens of South–South migration, this paper contributes to broader debates on how governance and migrant agency co-evolve in underexplored migration contexts. It underscores the need for more coordinated, inclusive, and evidence-based governance frameworks that centre migrant voices in policy design to foster equitable and sustainable solutions.