

Standing Committee – Families, Welfare, Care and the Life Course

The Standing Committee (SC) on **Families, Welfare, Care and the Life Course** was approved at a meeting of the IMISCOE Board of Directors on 17th April 2024.

Objectives

The SC objectives are to:

1. Draw wider attention in migration studies to the inter-connections between families, welfare and care, and their changing contexts.
2. Advance a life-course perspective in migration studies, by facilitating dialogue between scholars working on different life-course phases and transitions.
3. Contribute to local, national and international policy debates on welfare and care as they relate to migrants and their families, advocating for interventions to mitigate social risks across the migratory life-course.
4. Facilitate the career development of the next generation of researchers working in these fields.
5. Promote the inclusion of researchers from under-represented regions (Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Global South) and create more synergies between scholars based in different regions of the world.
6. Develop joint publications, collaborative projects and applications for funding.

Rationale

Migration was for a long time theorised almost exclusively in terms of individual economic rationalism (e.g. Sjaastad, 1962), and *homo economicus* continues to dominate migration policy debates (Carling and Collins, 2018). This individualistic approach neglects that the locus of decision-making is often the family unit, as a means to mitigate social and financial risks and ensure the family's collective welfare over time (Levitt et al., 2023). Social and financial risks can be mitigated through accessing both formal and informal sources of support, and importantly these sources of support are not geographically fixed but can be exchanged transnationally (ibid). Formal welfare mechanisms are obtained through institutions of state and market and include *inter alia* social security entitlements and pensions to support financial wellbeing, as well as healthcare and eldercare/social services to support physical and mental wellbeing. Informal sources of support include the exchanges of instrumental and emotional support across generations, as well as sharing or pooling of financial resources, for example to support the education of younger family members, or to pay medical costs for an older relative (Bilecen and Sienkiewicz, 2015).

Sources of support for welfare and care can also be accumulated (or eroded) over time. This is why a life-course perspective on questions of welfare and care within families is essential. A life-course perspective advances the study of migration by foregrounding how human stories and their varying pathways are situated across multiple points in time and multiple places (Katz and Grenier, 2023), thereby offering a corrective to long-held assumptions (in policy circles and public discourse more widely) that migration is primarily a phenomenon of younger adulthood. It also foregrounds the notion of ‘linked lives’, and how intergenerational relationships can be leveraged to boost collective welfare within families.

In sum, it is clear that families, welfare and care are inter-connected themes. We propose this designation for our SC to draw wider attention to these dynamics, which we believe are becoming more and more relevant for two reasons, one of which is connected to changes in the political relationship between states and their citizens/residents, and the other of which is connected to changes in families. Politically, states around the world are increasingly showing tendencies to down-size (e.g. via welfare state retrenchment) and super-size (e.g. via diaspora policies) (see Levitt et al. 2023). Likewise, family structures are changing in many parts of the world. In recognition of this, the SC adopts a broad understanding of ‘family’, including extended families and kinship networks. Migration can add further complexity to family dynamics, with evolving gender norms leading to reconfigurations of how labour is divided within families (Parrenas, 2005). In addition, the health inequalities facing migrants and ethnic minorities in Europe have been known about for at least two decades, yet it is only following the recent experience of the Covid-19 pandemic that calls for more equitable access to healthcare are starting to be heeded (Khunti et al. 2020).

We also believe that these inter-connections between families, welfare and care are at present not sufficiently represented within the constellation of IMISCOE’s standing committees. Prior to the establishment of research initiatives and standing committees within the network, IMISCOE did support panels at annual conferences on e.g. “Gender, Age and Generations” (7th Annual Conference, Liege 2010) and a previous iteration of our group, out of which SC Older Migrants emerged, was subtitled “Ageing Migrants: demography, welfare and agency” (c.2011-17). Furthermore, the Standing Committee on Families, Children and Youth was active between 2017 and 2019. In other words, themes such as welfare and intergenerational relations have been part of discussions within IMISCOE for some time, although not always centre-stage. The discussion of health-related topics has also been quite marginal within IMISCOE’s structures.

We propose that the time is now ripe to make these dynamics more visible within IMISCOE (and beyond), and that our SC is best placed to lead this thematic expansion thanks to the expertise contained in our membership. Thus far, our scope has been mainly limited to the latter part of the life-course, and so we eagerly anticipate forming new dialogues and initiatives on these thematics with scholars whose focus is childhood, young adulthood, middle-age, or intergenerational relations, and initiating a new generation of early-career researchers in the life-course perspective.

A life-course approach would therefore serve as an analytical and methodological framework to chart how migratory experience, or migrancy, impacts on individuals over time, and also how it impacts on their networks of kin and acquaintances through the life-course concept of ‘linked lives’. Longitudinal methodologies informed by the life-course perspective could help us understand causal links across a number of pressing questions, such as the paradoxical

relationships observed between health and migration over time (see Cela and Barbiano di Belgiojoso, 2023; Wallace, 2023); the dynamics of relocation decisions and how these are affected by life-course transitions such as parenthood, grandparenthood or retirement (Liversage and Mizrahi Mirdal, 2017); and the accumulation of economic advantage or disadvantage over the migratory life course (Gubernskaya and Dobрева, 2023).

However, our purview is not limited to developing new research questions and socialising the next generation. We also aspire to influence policy, and again a life-course perspective will be critical to this effort. Findings from life course-informed studies could help policy makers design social policy interventions to mitigate the accumulation of disadvantage in earlier adulthood and midlife (i.e. before it is too late) (Walker, 2018).

To operationalise this expansion of the SC's scope and rationale, we propose the following thematic Working Groups.

Thematic Working Groups

- **Financial welfare and welfare regimes:** covering topics such as income support within migrant families; family and child allocations; parental leave and childcare subsidies; private and public pensions; retirement as a life-course transition; welfare regimes and their intersection with migration regimes; portability of social security benefits across borders/jurisdictions; and lived experiences of welfare bureaucracy.
- **Healthcare and social services:** covering topics such as migrants' (and their families') access to and usage of healthcare / social services; racism and discrimination in healthcare and social services; social determinants of health; cultural competency among healthcare / social service providers; users' experiences of healthcare / social services; migrant workers in healthcare / social services; diaspora policies relating to healthcare entitlements; dying and end-of-life care.
- **Informal care and social support:** covering topics such as care chains; social networks, linked lives, loneliness; care/support for 'left-behind' family members; migrant grandparents and childcare contributions; intergenerational care exchanges; use of information and communication technologies within transnational families.
- **Migration and life-course transitions:** covering topics such as 'Zero generation' migration (older parents following adult children); the relationship between family formation and migration; mobilities for health care and social services; international retirement migration; return and circular migration at different life-course transitions; mobilities at the end of life.

Activities to grow the SC membership

- **Annual conference:** The submission window for proposals to the IMISCOE annual conference will be a privileged moment to engage new scholars in our group's activities.
- **Events for PhD students and ECRs:** Another privileged vector to grow our group is to engage the next generation of researchers in our SC's themes. As our PhD/ECR community grows, we will consult with them regularly so that any ECR initiatives which we facilitate are developed for and by ECRs and respond to their needs. We will also ensure that PhD students and ECRs have a meaningful role in the governance of our SC and are represented on the SC's Board (see Governance below).
- **'Co-badged' activities with other SCs:** While we have taken care to avoid thematic overlap between our SC and other SCs' designations, we envisage some interesting potential to collaborate with other SCs on some of our topics, e.g. SC Transnationalism in relation to portability of social security benefits; SC Gender and Sexuality in relation to gender gaps in pension coverage; SC Race, Racism and Discrimination in relation to racialisation and racism in healthcare settings.
- **Webinar series** (bi-monthly or quarterly): All thematic working groups will be represented in this webinar series. To reach out beyond our current membership, some webinars will be hosted in collaboration with (i) other SCs (see point above); (ii) other scholarly groups in other parts of the world, time-zones permitting, e.g. the Gerontological Society of America's Special Interest Group on International Aging and Migration.
- **Online Book Club:** An informal online gathering open to all members to discuss classic texts as well as recently published articles which are relevant to our SC thematics.
- **Events in currently under-represented regions** (Eastern and South-Eastern Europe and the Global South): This can create synergies for research collaborations, disseminating research results and also facilitate the training of PhD students.
- **Events in Europe, in which we would fund the participation of junior and senior scholars from the Global South:** Such activities would allow us to create more synergies between scholars based in different regions of the world.
- **Social media presence:** By actively engaging on platforms such as Twitter and LinkedIn with regular updates of new insights, thought-provoking content and interactive discussions, we will increase the visibility and relevance of our Standing Committee and foster connections across disciplines and geographical boundaries.

Means to achieve our aims:

IMISCOE Standing Committee funding will be used to fund activities that researchers are not able to fund through regular research funding or through their institutions. Moreover, we will apply a rotating scheme in which researchers affiliated with different thematic working groups will be able to use the funding to achieve the above-mentioned activities and objectives.

To promote collaboration and shared ground between thematic working groups, each thematic working group will be invited to suggest themes/speakers for the SC webinar series on a rotational basis. They will also be invited to suggest texts to discuss in the SC's Online Book Club. When suggesting themes/speakers/texts, thematic working groups will be encouraged to consider

potential overlaps and shared interests with other thematic working groups, in order to promote scholarly dialogue within the SC.

Governance

The governance structure of the SC will henceforth be composed of three bodies: the coordinators, the SC Board, and the general assembly.

The coordinators

Two coordinators will take care of the practical day-to-day running of the SC. They will communicate relevant information to the members of the SC through different channels (website, mailing list, etc.). They will also coordinate the sessions organized by the SC at the IMISCOE annual conferences.

The SC coordinators are required to elect an SC chair between themselves. The SC chair shall receive the IMISCOE financial support for the SC at their institution of affiliation. The SC chair shall also act as the main point of contact between the SC and the IMISCOE Network Office. In line with Article 7.7 of the IMISCOE Consortium Agreement, the chair of the Standing Committee needs to be a representative of an IMISCOE Member Institute.

Regarding the coordinators' term of office and the procedures for electing coordinators at the end of each term, the guidance outlined in the *General Framework for IMISCOE Standing Committees* will be followed.

The Board

The SC Board supervises and advises the work of the coordinators. It prepares the annual meetings of the Standing Committee and the strategic decisions of the general assembly. It will meet regularly every 4 months by video conference. It will also meet physically during the IMISCOE annual conferences.

Composition: There will be eight members, including the two coordinators. The six remaining positions on the board will be allocated in the following way:

- To promote representation of PhD members there will be one PhD Board member.
- To promote representation of early career members there will be one ECR Board member.
- To promote representation of and coordination between the four thematic working groups, there will be one representative from each of the four thematic working groups. Each thematic working group will have two co-leads, and one will represent their group on the SC Board.
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion:
 - Gender: We will strive to ensure a gender balance among Board members.
 - Race/ethnicity: We will strive to include currently under-represented groups within the Board membership.

- Age/seniority: Scholars at different career stages will be included in the Board membership, including at least two members who are at PhD/post-doctoral level.

General assembly

The general assembly is the core of the SC. All the members of the SC are part of the general assembly. They all have the right to vote to elect the two coordinators, according to the process and timeline stipulated by IMISCOE's Election Committee. They also have the right to vote for the panels which the SC 'sponsors' at the IMISCOE annual conference.

References

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