



CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

NAVIGATING THE POLITICS OF (DIS)INTEGRATION: REFUGEE FAMILIES' PATHWAYS TO INCLUSION.

Conference 23-24 April 2025, Brussels

In recent decades, few issues have been so intensively debated as the so-called “integration” of different groups of immigrants, including refugees and their families (Favell 2022; Gryzmala-Kazlowka & Phillimore 2018; Hinger & Schweitzer 2020; Joppke 2017; Phillimore 2021; Rytter 2019; Schinkel 2018). Across the global North, governments have introduced a variety of policies ranging from ‘civic integration’ to family reunification, and from social domains such as education and work to those of housing and health. While these policies are purportedly designed to strengthen migrants’ social inclusion, many seem to de facto reinforce the exclusion of specific groups (Bendixsen & Näre 2024). To some extent, this seems to be due to the notoriously complex nature of this branch of governance, as it involves multiple levels and competences within the state, and an amalgam of state and civil society actors who hold different views on what ‘integration’ is and how it works (Adam & Hepburn 2019; Joppke 2017). As a result, the multilevel governance of immigrant ‘integration’ tends to generate both ‘gaps’ and ‘frictions’, and opens up space for both collaboration and conflict (Campomori & Ambrosini 2020).

This political complexity is exacerbated by the fact that some of these policies are explicitly designed to discourage potential immigrants from settling in a given country by limiting their access to the welfare state (Hinger & Schweitzer 2020; Tallis 2022). Hence their rights are made contingent upon proof of their cultural assimilation and economic self-reliance (Schinkel 2015), they are redirected to precarious forms of employment (Castles 2015; Rytter & Ghandchi 2015), and they may be excluded from social rights altogether (Bendixsen & Näre 2024). At the same time, this complex, contradictory field of policies offers fertile ground for innovative practices of support at both local and transnational levels (Ataç al 2016; Ghorashi & Rast 2018; Larruina et al 2019; Wessendorf & Phillimore 2019; Vandermeersch et al 2023; Vandevordt & Verschraegen 2019). A wide range of actors thus constantly builds and rebuilds an ‘arrival infrastructure’ (Meeus et al 2020) that offers pathways of inclusion into different social domains such as housing, work, education, health, and into social and cultural life more generally. Together, this complex field of multi-level governance, the ambivalent aims of

including and excluding migrants from the welfare state, and the constant re-emergence of arrival infrastructures, creates a contentious 'politics of (dis)integration' (Hinger & Schweitzer 2020) that is difficult to navigate by immigrants and everyone who supports them.

Within this contentious field, refugees and their families have moved to the centre of many debates. For a long time, refugee families have been conceived of as a particularly 'deserving' group of migrants, which is reflected in policy principles such as 'non-refoulement', in relatively flexible (temporary) criteria for family reunification, and in the ad hoc establishment of reception facilities in response to mass displacement crises such as those following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. While this differential treatment continues to date, policy-makers have increasingly problematised the arrival and so-called 'integration' of refugees and their families (Debruyne 2024; Vandevoordt & Verschraegen 2019). As a result, refugees who seek to reunify with their families are subjected to conditions and criteria that are more flexible yet limited in time, as compared to the criteria imposed on other groups of immigrants. This creates specific challenges, both in terms of the reunification procedures (e.g. collecting official documents from war zones), and in terms of the psychosocial impact of family members' exposure to war on refugees' ability to deal with 'civic integration' policies after their arrival.

Nevertheless, the specific predicament of refugees cannot be disconnected from broader trends and problems in the governance of migrant families. Many countries have indeed raised the barriers to family reunification for several groups of migrants (Bonjour & de Hart 2013; Bonjour & Kraler 2015; Bonizzoni 2018; Desmet et al 2023). And while family concerns are known to shape how migrants navigate policies of 'civic integration', housing, work, and so on, these same policies tend to conceive of migrants as isolated individuals that need to be 'integrated' economically and culturally (Bauder 2019; Klok & Dagevos 2023; Van Acker et al 2022). In other words, families continue to play a crucial, but poorly understood role in mediating between migrants' daily lives and the policies affecting them. If we want to better understand how different groups of migrants are affected by and navigate the 'politics of (dis)integration', we thus need to pay close attention to the experiences of different sub-groups of migrants (e.g. refugees, family reunification, labour migration,...) and, within these sub-groups, the different experiences of family members.

This two-day conference will examine how the contentious 'politics of (dis)integration' shapes the social in/exclusion of different groups of migrants and their families, and how different actors navigate this complex, contradictory field of policies. We are particularly - but not exclusively - interested in contributions that zoom in on the specific sub-group of refugees (and their families), or that compare policies towards different groups of refugees (e.g. International Protection vs Temporary Protection Directive) and towards other groups of immigrants (e.g. family reunification, labour migration,...).

We welcome contributions that examine:

- How 'civic integration' and social policies create challenges and opportunities for the well-being of migrant families, and their social inclusion into domains such as housing, work, education, health, and so on;
- The strategies of specific actors to facilitate the social inclusion of migrants and their families, such as migrant families themselves, migrant diaspora, social workers, volunteers, and a wide range of local, regional and national state actors;

- How 'integration policies' exert differential effects on 'refugees' and other groups of immigrants (e.g., those entering through family reunification; people receiving Temporary Protection Status from the war in Ukraine);
- The interactions between policies of 'civic integration' and other policy competences such as housing, work, and education;
- Innovative practices emerging from collaborations and/or conflicts between state and civil society actors;
- Innovative practices of support or 'infrastructuring' across local, regional or national contexts;
- The tension between 'inclusion' (and integration-related policies) on the one hand, and the fact that people's migration trajectories (e.g. legal status) are fragmented and subject to change over time;
- The hierarchies of deservingness which emerge from social policies and their implementations;
- The gap between principles and implementation of policies in migrants' social inclusion;
- The complex interconnection of different policy domains in facilitating or hindering the inclusion of migrants and their families;
- Ideas of family and how they play out in policies and their implementation – and what effect they have on the lives of migrants;
- The usefulness and relation between different concepts and research traditions, such as 'social inclusion', 'housing pathways', 'arrival infrastructures', 'social innovation', and 'integration-as-opportunity-structures'
- How does governing the 'other' through 'integration' policies constitute the identity of the host society? And how does academic research into immigrant 'integration' contribute to this?

After the conference, a selected number of papers will be invited to contribute to a **special issue**.

Opening Keynote by **prof. Adrian Favell** (University College Cork)

Closing Keynote by **prof. Halleh Ghorashi** (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam).

More information:

This is the final conference of REFUFAM, an interdisciplinary consortium examining the impact of Belgian migration-related policies on the social inclusion of refugees and their family members. The consortium is funded by Belspo Brain.be 2.0, and includes partners from Ghent University (coordinator), Odisee University of Applied Sciences, Université Catholique de Louvain (UCL) and the Catholic University of Leuven (KUL).

www.refufam.be

Practicalities:

- Please submit a title, name(s) and abstract (250-300 words) to giacomo.orsini@ugent.be before **15 October 2024**.
- Authors whose contribution is accepted will be notified by **1 December 2024**.
- Registration fees are 50 EUR for regular participants, 20 EUR for practitioners, and 10 EUR for students.
- We only accept in-person presentations.



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