

Stream #13

De-Standardization of Retirement Pathways: Conceptual, Institutional, and Life-Course perspectives

Conveners:

- Łukasz Jurek, Wrocław University of Economics and Business
- Joanna Rutecka-Góra, SGH Warsaw School of Economics
- Izabela Grabowska, SGH Warsaw School of Economics

The transition from work to retirement is undergoing a profound transformation across advanced welfare states. Moving beyond the traditional model of an abrupt, irreversible exit from the labour market (the “retirement guillotine”), retirement is increasingly understood as a de-standardized, multi-phased, and often reversible process. This shift reflects broader life-course destandardization, institutional reforms, demographic ageing, and changing individual preferences. However, research remains fragmented across disciplines, with varied conceptualizations (pathways, trajectories, routes), methodological approaches, and policy implications.

This stream invites papers that critically examine the de-standardization of retirement pathways from interdisciplinary and comparative perspectives. We aim to foster dialogue between sociology, economics, political science, social policy, and gerontology to build a more coherent understanding of this complex phenomenon. We welcome theoretical, empirical, and policy-oriented contributions addressing themes such as:

- **Conceptual & Methodological Innovations:** How can we define, measure, and compare de-standardized retirement pathways (e.g., phased retirement, bridge employment, unretirement, involuntary exits)? What are the strengths and limitations of sequence analysis, latent class models, mixed methods, and life-course approaches?
- **Institutional Drivers & Barriers:** How do pension systems, labour market regulations, disability schemes, and corporate HR policies enable or constrain flexible retirement transitions? What is the role of welfare regime typologies in shaping national patterns of de-standardization?

- **Life-Course & Intersectional Dynamics:** How are retirement pathways gendered, classed, and shaped by health, family obligations, and care responsibilities? How do earlier life-course events influence later-life exit patterns?
- **Individual Agency & Decision-Making:** What are the roles of financial necessity, subjective well-being, work identity, and (mis)perceptions of ageing in choosing non-standard pathways? How do behavioural economics and narrative approaches explain retirement choices?
- **Policy Implications & Future Designs:** What are the consequences of de-standardization for pension sustainability, social equity, and active ageing agendas? How can social policy and corporate practice evolve from supporting a single “retirement age” towards facilitating flexible “retirement periods” or “ecosystems”?

By bringing together diverse perspectives, this stream will advance theoretical frameworks, methodological rigor, and evidence-based policy recommendations for managing extended working lives in an era of destandardized transitions.