

Stream #14

Welfare States and Migration: Welfare Attitudes and Welfare Access

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The politics of migration is one of the most consequential arenas in which the scope and meaning of social citizenship is negotiated and contested in European welfare states. Debates about who “belongs,” who is “deserving,” and how social protection should be delivered have become increasingly salient in both public discourse and welfare-state policymaking. At the same time, these debates point to the need for welfare state scholarship to engage with the racialised as well as class-based divisions bound up in these processes.

In the context of a European Social Model “under pressure,” this stream invites theoretical and empirical contributions that examine how migration and welfare state developments intersect in shaping social rights, welfare-state legitimacy, and migrants and non-migrants perceptions of these two. We welcome papers that address how welfare states and migration politics and policy define, contest, and operationalise social citizenship, including through conditionality, scope, and portability of social rights. And also, papers addressing changes to social benefits and services in light of migration and social policy developments. Equally important are contributions that analyse how policies are implemented in practice: street-level discretion, administrative burden, lack of system knowledge and perceptions, and digitalisation, may all widen the gap between formal entitlements and effective access—sometimes producing “chilling effects” and non-take-up. And likewise, contributions that address how civil society and intermediaries, such as NGOs or informal networks, involving migrants themselves as key actors, might mediate access to welfare-state resources, shape social rights awareness, and influencing public narratives about deservingness and belonging.

Complementing this, we invite research on migrants’ own perceptions of social rights and welfare institutions: trust and distrust, experiences of stigma, fear of

negative consequences (e.g., reputational harm, immigration-related risks), and the everyday strategies through which migrants navigate welfare systems. These perspectives are crucial for understanding why formal rights do not necessarily translate into uptake, well-being, or inclusion.