

## Stream #8

# Families in Transition: Rethinking Social Policy Design

### Conveners:

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Family structures across Europe and beyond have become increasingly diverse and fluid. Individuals now live in a wide range of family and household constellations, including multi-local households (in which children alternate between parental homes), re-partnered and blended households, multi-generational and extended households, single-adult households, shared or non-kin living arrangements, and constellations characterised by frequent entries and exits of members. Yet, who is counted as a family member can produce large differences in access to social protection and pose acute challenges when programmes rely on family-based eligibility rules. Meanwhile, welfare states typically continue to consider families within households, even though caregiving, financial support, and parental involvement increasingly extend across household boundaries. Moreover, emerging evidence suggests that insufficient or unstable welfare provision can itself shape living arrangements, contributing to the rise of multi-family or extended households as an adjustment to economic pressures.

By focusing on the family as a central yet evolving unit of social policy, this stream aims to contribute to ongoing debates about the adaptability, inclusiveness, and conceptual robustness of welfare states in times of demographic, social, and economic change. We invite contributions that examine, among others:

- How welfare states recognise, classify, and respond to family diversity, and how these classifications shape access to social protection;
- Gaps between policy design and actual household organisation, or administrative and legal challenges in defining family membership;
- Implications of family (mis)classification for poverty reduction, labour-market integration, and gender equality;

- The role of intra-household inequalities (e.g., unequal resource sharing, gendered poverty risks, and child-specific deprivation) in understanding policy effectiveness;
- The role of social policies in influencing family living arrangements.

Core questions include: How do means-tested benefits, tax-credit systems, child support, childcare and leave rights, or housing support systems assume certain household structures – and with what (distributional) consequences in terms of eligibility rules? How do policies create inequalities for individuals living in multi-local or composite households? How does household complexity interact with intra-household inequality, and how might policy reforms address both simultaneously?

Contributions may be quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods. We particularly encourage comparative work exploring variation across welfare regimes, policy sectors, or institutional contexts, and interdisciplinary contributions from sociology, political science, law, demography, economics, and social policy analysis. Finally, we welcome papers proposing reforms that improve the fit between welfare-state objectives and contemporary household patterns, as well as contributions evaluating whether policy innovations that appear effective for complex or diverse households in one national context could be transferred or adapted to others.