

BRISPO Newsletter April 2026



Newsletter of the Brussels Institute for Social
and Population Studies, VUB

In the spring edition of the BRISPO newsletter we spotlight a selection of recent publications from our research team, covering topics ranging from migration and human rights to health inequalities, labour conditions, education, and urban studies. We also share updates on new books, opinion pieces, and policy-relevant research. Alongside these publications, we highlight key developments within our research community, including PhD defences, media appearances, project updates, and new job opportunities.

Publications @ BRISPO

Advancing Refugee Migration Forecasting with Machine Learning

Haodong Qi, Alina Sîrbu, Rahman Momeni, Enes Hisam, Carlos Arcila-Calderón, [Tuba Bircan](#) & Stefano Iacus have published a new article in *International Journal of Data Science and Analytics* titled “Forecasting Refugee Migration with High-Dimensional Covariate Space”. The study presents an innovative machine-learning approach to forecasting refugee movements by integrating a wide range of potential drivers, including conflict dynamics, economic conditions, and environmental factors. By leveraging high-dimensional data, the model significantly improves predictive accuracy and offers valuable insights for



evidence-based migration policy and strategic planning. Read more [here](#).

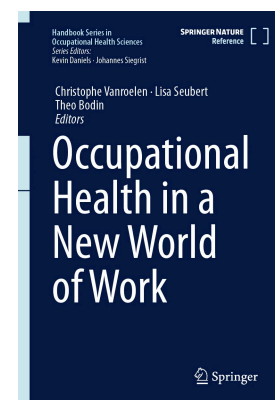


Understanding Migration Data in Europe: Sources, Definitions, and Policy Implications

Ahmad Wali Ahmad-Yar and Tuba Bircan have contributed a chapter to *The Routledge Handbook of the Politics of Migration in Europe* (pp. 525-534), titled “Data Sources for International Migration in Europe: Categories, Definitions and Policy Uses”. This chapter reviews the main data sources used to study international migration in Europe, including administrative data, surveys, and population registers. It highlights how differences in definitions and measurement shape migration statistics and influence research and policy debates. Learn more and order [here](#).

New Handbook on Occupational Health in a New World of Work

We are proud to share the pre-publication of the Handbook on *Occupational Health in a New World of Work*, co-edited by Christophe Vanroelen, Lisa Seubert and Theo Bodin. The volume brings together international research on how digitalisation, new employment forms and labour market transformations are reshaping workers’ health and well-being. Several colleagues from our research group contributed chapters, including Ella Oelbrandt, Elief Vandevenne, Jens Doms, Julie Vanderleyden, Deborah De Moortel, Jessie Gevaert and Meixuan Li, alongside many other international scholars. Together, the handbook offers an up-to-date overview of emerging risks, inequalities, and policy challenges in the evolving world of work. Read more [here](#).





Precarious Employment and Mental Well-Being in the Gig Economy

Elief Vandevenne, Christophe Vanroelen, Lara Stas and Jessie Gevaert have published a new article in the journal *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health* examining how precarious employment relates to mental well-being among gig workers. Using survey data from 397 Belgian gig workers, the study finds that precarious employment is linked to poorer mental well-being among main gig workers (>24h/week), but not supplementary workers (\leq 24h/week). For main gig workers, this link is largely explained by low social support, while for supplementary workers, low autonomy acts as a key mediator. Although skill discretion does not mediate the relationship between precarious employment and well-being, lower skill discretion is associated with poorer mental well-being in both groups. These results show that time spent in gig work shapes psychosocial risk, underlining the importance of policies that address the intrinsic quality of work, not just employment status and labor rights. Read more [here](#).

Educational Inequalities in Cancer Mortality in Belgium

In the article “Decomposing Educational Inequalities in Cancer Mortality: The Roles of Incidence and Survival in Belgium, 2004-2013” published in *Social Science & Medicine*, Joachim Gotink, Freija Verdoodt, and Sylvie Gadeyne present a nationwide cohort study investigating the drivers of socioeconomic inequalities in cancer mortality in Belgium by disentangling incidence and survival components. Their results indicate that while inequalities among younger adults are primarily driven by differences in cancer occurrence, survival disparities play a larger role at older ages, underscoring the need for both prevention and equitable access to timely diagnosis and treatment. Read more [here](#).





Unveiling Youth Fertility Aspirations in Sub-Saharan Africa

Another article by [Juliette De Vestel](#) and [Sylvie Gadeyne](#) titled “Unveiling Youth Fertility Aspirations: The Role of Gender Attitudes in Sub-Saharan Africa” was published in *African Journal of Reproductive Health*. This study uses Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) data from 10 high-fertility sub-Saharan African countries to examine how gender attitudes shape fertility preferences among youth aged 15-24. The results show that tolerance of wife beating is associated with higher desired fertility for both men and women, while gender preferences for children differ by gender, generally positive for men and more mixed for women, highlighting substantial cross-country variation. Read more [here](#).

Evolving Gender Attitudes and Fertility Preferences in Sub-Saharan Africa

[Juliette De Vestel](#) and [Sylvie Gadeyne](#) present a comparative analysis using Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) data from Ethiopia, Malawi, Mali, Nigeria, and Zambia, examining how the relationship between gender attitudes and desired fertility among young women is evolving. Their article, “Evolving Gender Attitudes and Fertility Preferences: A Study of Young Women in Sub-Saharan Africa” published in *Studies in Family Planning*, explores these changing dynamics. The findings indicate that women with more egalitarian views increasingly diverge from high-fertility norms, while traditional attitudes remain pronatalist, particularly in contexts with higher levels of education. Read more [here](#).





Class, Taste, and Regional Inequalities in Food Consumption

In his article "Sociogenetic Fields and the Fiction of Unity: Classed Taste and Regional Differentiation in Italian Food Consumption" published in *Cultural Sociology*, [Tomas Bilevicius](#) develops a new theoretical framework for the study of classed taste in historically differentiated national fields, using Italy's enduring North-South divide as its central analytical lens. By integrating field theory with a sociogenetic perspective, the study shows that while class-based tastes persist, their specific expressions vary across regions. These findings offer a nuanced understanding of how cultural practices are shaped by both social stratification and historical regional dynamics. Read more [here](#).

Dismantling Urban Sanctuary and the 'Migrant Crisis' in New York City

[René Kreichauf](#) has published a new article, "Dismantling Urban Sanctuary and the 'Migrant Crisis': The Political Economy of Solidarity and Providing Support to Asylum-Seeking Migrants in New York City" in *City*, examining the city's sanctuary and migration policies from 2018 to 2023. Using a qualitative approach, the study traces how urban government, service providers, and migrant organizations responded to the arrival of asylum seekers, particularly under the context of Donald Trump's 'zero tolerance' policies and the later escalation of the so-called 'migrant crisis'. Kreichauf shows that emergency governance measures have intensified austerity and labor-focused strategies that facilitate the exploitation of asylum seekers. He introduces the concept of a "punitive market sanctuary", where access to city support depends not only on perceived deservingness but also on racialised labor exploitation. Read more [here](#).





Toward 'Multiplied Displacement': Theorizing at the Intersections of Migration and Urban Studies

In this article, [René Kreichauf](#) and Loretta Lees analyse and then conceptually combine separately developed frameworks of displacement in urban and migration research. The authors consider internationally displaced migrants' continued and multiplied experiences of displacement in cities and urban areas as an entry point through which to explore the intersections between international and urban displacement. In doing so, they move beyond disciplinary divides and take some preliminary conceptual and analytical steps toward developing a more rigorous, interdisciplinary, and comprehensive framework of displacement: one that enables us to see connections, similarities, and differences between a variety of displacement processes, forms, and experiences. Read more [here](#).

School Matters: How Stigma and Supportive Relationships Shape Adolescents' Mental Health Help-Seeking Attitudes

The article "School Matters: A Multilevel Analysis of Stigma, Supportive Relations and Adolescents' Mental Health Help-Seeking Attitudes", published in the *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, examines how school-level stigma and supportive relationships shape adolescents' attitudes towards seeking mental health support. Using survey data from 4,702 secondary school students in Flanders (Belgium), [Fanny D'hondt](#) and her co-authors show that higher levels of public stigma at the school level are associated with less favourable help-seeking attitudes, while supportive relations - particularly with teachers - are linked to more positive attitudes, including towards professional services outside school. Read more [here](#).



SOCIALIZING INEQUALITY

Class, Culture and Cognition
in Early Childhood

EDITED BY DIETER VANDEBROECK,
MAAIKE JAPPENS AND ANNETTE LAREAU



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New Book: *Socializing Inequality. Class, Culture and Cognition in Early Childhood*

[Dieter Vandebroek](#) and [Maaïke Jappens](#) present their new book *Socializing Inequality*. Co-written and co-edited with award-winning sociologist [Annette Lareau](#) (author of "Unequal Childhoods" and "Listening to People", former President of the American Sociological Association), the book brings together original research from France, Norway, Belgium, Sweden and the US. Using a combination of participant observation, survey-analysis, family ethnography, creative methods and systematic literature review, this book delves into the varied ways in which class inequality shapes the lifeworld of young children from family

relationships and early school experiences to leisure patterns and language development. In addition, it also focuses on the key question of how children themselves come to experience and understand the role of class inequality in their everyday lives. The book is available for order in paperback and hardcover, but will also be available soon as a fully 'open access'-publication! More information is available [here](#).

New Comment by Francesc Baró and Elsa Gallez in *Nature Climate Change*

The comment co-authored by [Francesc Baró](#) and [Elsa Gallez](#) is titled "Greening schools for climate-resilient, inclusive and liveable cities". It is based on the results of the [COOLSCHOOLS](#) project. The article highlights the transformative potential of turning school environments into nature-based climate shelters. Such interventions not only mitigate extreme heat and increase urban greening but also foster children's well-being, equitable access to nature, environmental education, and community cohesion. Drawing on evidence from European and international cities, the authors show that participatory, biodiverse, and climate-adapted schoolyards enhance thermal comfort, biodiversity, and socio-cultural outcomes while addressing structural inequalities in access to green spaces. The comment emphasizes that schoolyards should be designed and maintained as inclusive, climate-resilient hubs that integrate learning, health, and sustainability objectives, positioning schools as catalysts for broader urban transformation and climate justice. The paper is available for subscribed users [here](#).



News from Team Members @ BRISPO



Elsa Gallez Successfully Defended Her PhD

We are pleased to announce that on 29/01/2026, our BRISPO colleague [Elsa Gallez](#) successfully defended her PhD. Her thesis, titled "Schools as Gateways to Urban Nature for All: A Mixed-Methods Analysis of Children's (In)equitable Exposure to School-Related Green and Blue Infrastructure in Brussels and Other European Cities", was carried out within the [COOLSCHOOLS project](#): Realising potentials of nature-based climate shelters in school environments for urban transformation. Elsa was supervised by [Francesc Baró](#) and [Sylvie Gadeyne](#).

Join the EXPULSE Project: Open Positions in Urban Inequality Research

We are currently recruiting for four positions (one postdoc and three PhDs) within the ERC-funded project [EXPULSE - Urban Expulsion Regimes](#), led by [Eva Swyngedouw](#). The EXPULSE project examines how urban expulsion regimes - particularly housing evictions - shape housing trajectories, urban citizenship, and socio-spatial inequalities across European cities.

Start date: September 2026

Application deadline: 15 May 2026

More information and application links can be found on the BRISPO [website](#).

**WE
ARE
HIRING**



Citizen Science Project on Safety Perceptions in Brussels

Researchers at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel and the Brussels Institute for Social and Population Studies (BRISPO) have launched a citizen science project called **Moment**, an innovative study that uses a smartphone app to map how people feel (un)safe in public spaces across the Brussels Capital Region in real time. The project is led by BRISPO colleagues **Petrus te Braak** and **Theun Pieter van Tienoven** who aim to better understand how safety perceptions vary in everyday life: who feels safe, where, when, and under which circumstances. The findings will contribute to a safer, more inclusive, and accessible city.

The GPS-based app prompts participants with short questions about how safe they feel at specific locations and times, enabling researchers to capture lived experiences beyond traditional crime statistics. The results are expected to provide nuanced insights into when, where, and why safety perceptions vary, with the aim of contributing to a more inclusive and accessible city through evidence-based debate and policy.

Participation is open to adults who regularly spend time in Brussels, and data collection runs through summer 2026, with first findings anticipated in 2027.

International Recognition for Influential Health Inequalities Research

The article "The social determinants of health-related quality of life among people with chronic disease: a systematic literature review" by **Terhi Kangas** et al. has been selected by the *International Society for Quality of Life Research* as one of the five most cited articles published in 2025, underscoring its relevance for research on health inequalities and chronic disease. Read more [here](#).



Media Highlights @ BRISPO

Patrick Deboosere interviewed on VRT Radio

On Thursday, 12 February 2026, [Patrick Deboosere](#) was interviewed on VRT Radio 1 in the programme *De wereld van Sofie*. The discussion focused on fertility and the desire to have children, including the recent initiative in France where all 29-year-olds will receive a letter encouraging them to think about their plans for children and to make a medical appointment to check for possible fertility issues. The interview also explored whether such campaigns could be effective in Belgium, what other approaches might be considered, and how the decline in birth rates could impact society.

You can listen to the full programme (in Dutch) [here](#).



New Opinion Pieces on Racism by Pieter-Paul Verhaeghe

Two opinion pieces (both in Dutch) by [Pieter-Paul Verhaeghe](#) address different aspects of racism. They were published recently in *De Morgen* and *SamPol*. The first article, titled "Academische vrijheid stopt waar racisme begint", published in *De Morgen*, questions the limits of academic freedom in the

context of controversial appointments and racist claims. Pieter-Paul argues that universities should uphold human rights and that claims of scientific validity for racist ideas must be challenged with empirical evidence and ethical consideration. The piece emphasises that academic freedom does not extend to supporting ideas that undermine human rights. Read more [here](#). Within the second article, "Het racisme van radicaalrechts moeten we ook juridisch bestrijden" in *SamPol*, Pieter-Paul reflects on the recent conviction of a high-profile radical right figure and discusses why racist political discourse should be confronted not only socially but also through legal means. The opinion piece covers the broader implications for democracy and how legal action can serve as part of the response to politically motivated racism. Read more [here](#).

Opinion Piece by Deborah De Moortel: "Will Women Adapt? Only if Their Jobs Do Too"

In a new opinion piece entitled "Will women adapt? Only if their jobs do too" published in *Knack* (in Dutch), [Deborah De Moortel](#) reflects on the current debate about pensions and women's participation in the labour market. It calls for addressing the quality and organization of jobs, as women's willingness to work more hours is closely tied to how their work is experienced. Read more [here](#).



Opinion Piece by Tulya Su Güven on the Role of Public Spaces in Migrant Integration

[Tulya Su Güven](#), published an opinion piece on the role of public spaces in migrant integration, first in English, on the website of the Brussels Interdisciplinary Research Centre on Migration and Minorities (BIRMM), and subsequently in *Knack* (in Dutch). In the article "More Than Work and Housing: Why Public Spaces Are Crucial for Integration" she argues that integration policies should move beyond a narrow focus on employment and housing and pay greater attention to everyday public spaces as key arenas of social interaction, belonging, and inclusion.

The article in English is available [here](#) (BIRMM website) and in Dutch [here](#) (in *Knack*).

Past Events @ BRISPO

BRISPO Lunch Seminar: How Language Shapes Race - Exploring the Intersection of Language Ideology and Racism

BRISPO lunch seminar "How Language Shapes Race - Exploring the Intersection of Language Ideology and Racism" delivered by Sibö R. Kanobana from the Open University of the Netherlands, took place on 11 March 2026, 12:30-14:00. The seminar examined how language ideologies influence racial perceptions and practices, highlighting the intersection of linguistic norms, social hierarchies, and systemic racism.



VUB **BRISPO** BRUSSELS INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL AND POPULATION STUDIES

BRISPO LUNCH SEMINAR

How Language Shapes Race. Exploring the intersection of language ideology and racism

Dr. Sibö R. Kanobana
Open University of the Netherlands



11.03.2026 12:30-14:00

Pleinlaan 5, 4th floor Room 5.4.21

We want these seminars to be informal and casual. Everyone is welcome to bring their lunch along.



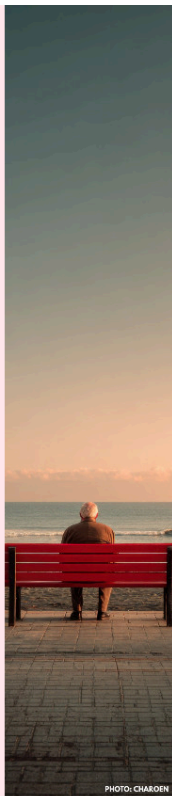
PHOTO ELICITATION INTERVIEWS: EXPLORING LONELINESS AMONG TURKISH OLDER MIGRANTS

Seminar with prof. **Tineke Fokkema** (Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute and Erasmus University Rotterdam)

25/03/2026 11:00-12:00

Pleinlaan 5, room 4.21 4th floor

In-person event Free entry, no registration required



Exploring Loneliness Among Older Turkish Migrants with Tineke Fokkema

On 24 March 2026, the Brussels Institute for Social and Population Studies (BRISPO) hosted a seminar by Tineke Fokkema (Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute) on photo elicitation interviews exploring loneliness among Turkish older adults. Fokkema discussed qualitative research methods –such as using photographs to prompt in-depth reflections—to better understand the lived experiences of loneliness among older adults with a migration background. The seminar highlighted how visual and narrative techniques can enrich insights into social isolation and emotional wellbeing beyond what traditional surveys capture, and contributed to ongoing debates on ageing, migration, and social connectedness.

Future events @ BRISPO



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TO CAMPUS

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Market Integration of Newcomers
and Refugees**



11-12 June 2026



Brussels

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Submission deadline: 29 April 2026

From Camp to Campus: Expert Workshop

As part of the FWO-funded SBO research project [From Camp to Campus](#), BRISPO Research Unit AIMSLab is organising an international expert workshop on **Thursday 11 June 2026, 09:00 - Friday 12 June 2026, 18:00** that will bring together scholars working at the intersection of higher education, labour market integration, and newcomer trajectories.

The workshop aims to create a space for in-depth discussion, collective reflection, and knowledge exchange, rather than a conventional conference format. Contributions will receive extensive feedback and encourage dialogue across disciplines, methods, and national contexts.

During the workshop, participants will discuss a variety of topics including: transitions to higher education and employment for newcomers, university-employer-policy linkages, social investment and inclusion in higher education, qualification recognition and skills matching, support services and institutional practices, challenges for newcomers and service providers, education-to-work inequalities, and comparative cross-country perspectives.

[Call for papers for this workshop is open till 29/04/2026.](#)

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More Information on
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